JULY

Weird Tales

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THE THIEF of FORTHE

a shuddery story of the dreadful weird magic of a treacherous aged sorcerer

By CLIFFORD BALL

Paul Ernst
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G. G. Pendarves

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Thief of Forthe

By CLIFFORD BALL

A swift-moving, romantic story of a thief who coveted a kingdom, and the appalling secret of an old magician

THE crude stone chamber was lighted only by the flickering flame of a single torch thrust into a crevice in the wall. Wrenched by the drafts of the dank underground dungeon, it cast fitful gleams over the features of the two figures seated at opposite sides of the low rock table occupying the exact center of the small enclosure. This article, with the two chairs supporting the men, alone graced the bareness of this sunken hole that had, in a bygone age, echoed with the groans of tortured and dying men. The walls were damp with the moisture of eons.

"I grant you," argued Karlk, the magician, stroking his long beard with the slender fingers of a woman, "that Thrall has been a fair king. Yes. But not a good one."

"Good enough for me!" grumbled the other, more powerful man. He struck a clenched fist on the stone of the table to emphasize his insistence, at the same time eyeing the black-cowled figure of Karlk with tiny fires of suspicion in the depths of his long-lashed gray eyes.

In all the kingdom of Forthe there could hardly have been found two men of such different types. The magician was of slender frame, of small features, and delicate hands and feet. He had never appeared in any other costume than the one he now wore—a long robe of ebon silk almost touching the ground as he walked, held by a twisted cord at the waist. A black cowl covered his head; the heavy beard and hirsute growth before the ears left only the flashing, malignant eyes and the thin nostrils visible. There were many whispers to the effect that Karlk was not really of the race of men and that if anyone would have the unthinkable courage to uncover his person, he would discover, not a human form, but some monstrosity impossible for the mind of mankind to imagine.

The other man was virtually naked. Beyond the breech-clout he wore and the sandals on his feet his only article of adornment was the slender sword dangling by his side. To this his right hand frequently strayed; obviously the weapon was almost part of the man. He had known the clash of steel in combat; convincing proofs of this were the great scars that crossed one another over many parts of his naked flesh. Unlike the magician he was clean-shaven, his hair bound in the back by a thin gold chain. The well-shaped skull gave proof that brain backed his brawn. Relaxed, as an animal of the wild rests, he still gave the impression of a creature ready to spring into snarling, ferocious battle. He had cause for alertness, for he was Rald, prince among thieves.

"Good enough!" repeated the thief. "What cause have you against Thrall? Didn't he save your accursed skin the time that missing guardsman was found outside these walls crawling on all fours and barking like a dog? And didn't I see the poor devil myself before they mercifully cut off his head—a head with long, pointed, furry ears on it? Thrall covered your deviltry, didn't he?"

"An unfortunate experiment. One of

my servants neglected his watch over the —man. He wandered outside." Karlk fingered his beard reminiscently. "The king had my 'experiment' destroyed, so my stupid servant reluctantly took its place."

Rald spat on the stones of the floor.

"I have encountered murderers I liked better!"

"You do not fear me, Rald?" inquired the magician, gently.

"When I learn how to fear, I'll seek another profession, oh frightener of children!"

"Even brave men can be taught." There was a note of menace in the low tones.

Rald shrugged. "Don't threaten me. I am no housewife screaming at shadows in the streets. I came here tonight to learn why you desired a member of my profession. If you pull any of your filthy tricks I'll pull that crusty beard of yours and maybe see more of your face."

The eyes of the magician gleamed red. "Look, Rald," he said, "and see how men have died!"

He extended his left hand with outspread fingers pointing at the blackness of the damp walls. A second, two sec-

"On one terrible day a princess of Forthe became a captive."

onds, and still Karlk remained immobile. Then a pale light appeared to spread over the skin of the hand, the digits became phosphorescent and tiny blue sparks emerged suddenly at the fingertips. Five streaks of blue light ran from the outstretched arm to the wall. Portions of the age-old solid stones broke into slivers and rattled to the floor.

RALD's eyes opened a trifle wider, but he grinned and spat again. "Before you could have gotten that devilish power —whatever it is—as far as your elbow I'd have cut your arm off right there had you pointed it at me! You'll get no allegiance from me with threats, oh wizard! Better offer me wine; these accursed dungeons chill me more than they do you. What do you want of me, Karlk?"

"Not to disagree, my friend."

"I am not your friend. You have none."

"For which I am grateful. Friends mean compromises. I deal in bargains—and get better results."

"What bargain do you seek with me?" Rald's eyes were as watchful as the beasts of the jungles, and now his hand stayed on the sword-hilt.

"I wish you to steal something for me."

Rald expelled a mouthful of air derisively. "Then why all this talk of kings and magic? Of course you want me to steal! For what other purpose would you summon Rald? What seek you, wizard, that your magic cannot obtain? Some of Thrall's jewels?—a stone or two from the Inner Temple? No women, mind you! I don't deal in them. What is the bargain and what my reward?"

Rald expanded his chest; he was proud with the pride of an expert in his profession.

Karlk laughed shortly, wickedly. "Jewels? The prizes of the temples? Ha! From the playgrounds for children unlearnt in the mysteries of the skies! I seek a greater prize, something so earthly my *unearthly* hands cannot touch it without the aid of your nimble fingers, oh Rald! *I seek the kingdom of Forthe!*"

Shocked, the notorious thief started upright in the stone chair. Bewilderment strained his countenance; incredulity stamped horror on his features as he sought to comprehend blasphemy.

"Forthe!" he exclaimed. "Forthe! Why —none but the Seven Gods could steal Forthe from King Thrall of the Ebon Dynasty!"

"Except Karlk," amended the magician.

"Steal Forthe!" muttered Rald. "Rebellion—treachery—millions to bribe—for what? A powerful kingdom—aye! But who shall rule it, granting you gain it? You with the blood of its peoples on your hands and the terror of yourself in their hearts?"

The magician's voice became a whisper. "King Rald!" he said.

A silent moment passed before the agile brain of the thief encompassed the significance of Karlk's intentions, so utterly bizarre the idea of stealing Forthe appeared, but abruptly the outlaw was himself again as his natural daring and coolness won over the startled instincts of generations.

"I see," he said slowly. "The bargain, eh? And your share?"

"A trifling matter, oh my king!" the magician mocked. "Merely the—shall we say?—voice behind the throne. A whisper now and then. No interference with your politics, understand. I am a scientist. Just a little more freedom for—experiments, a condescension in——"

"For deviltry, which I like not! To Nargarth's pits with you, Karlk!"

The magician's face remained unaltered; one would have thought the dark beard below the piercing eyes only a

mask. He began to whisper, insinuatingly:

"Jewels of the empire, viands and wines from the slopes of Ygoth, dancing-girls from Ynema—perhaps even the Lady Thrine for yourself, oh father of a new dynasty!"

The thief's head lowered an inch or so as he contemplated a vision. His hand slipped from the hilt of his sword. Rald dreamed a dream of empire, as many powerful men had done before, as many more would do in ages yet unborn.

BELOW the golden shafts of the low-riding moon that was suspended in magnificent splendor far out over the desert sands leading to the neighboring kingdom of Ygoth, the black towers of King Thrall's palace raised forbidding fingers into the midnight sky. An omniscience of the past hovered over those ragged skylines; a susceptible observer might have imagined the flickering spirits of bygone kings floating to and fro among the crumbling turrets, guarding the castle walls and casting watchful eyes over the mansions and huts of the surrounding countryside; ghosts watching over Thrall, the last king of the Ebon Dynasty—a king with no heir to carry on the ancient line.

On the rugged rocks below the outer walls of the palace grounds, his naked body immersed to the waist in green foliage, his brain seething with plans for the most daring, wildest attempt of his adventurous career, stood Rald, the cunning and intrepid thief of Forthe. His heart, for all his outward calm, pounded a little harder beneath his ribs; there was a tingling in his blood not born of wine. Bodily he responded to all the oft-known thrills of the prowl; only in his clever brain (now somewhat benumbed by the magnitude of his enterprise) dwelt the shadowy doubts engendered by the past prescience of the magician, Karlk.

He was too far removed from the patrolled gateways for guards to spy him in the desert moonlight, yet he slunk toward the walls more like an animal than a man. Desert winds and the erosion of time had emptied many crevices between the rocks comprising the stone barrier. Cat-like, his fingers and toes found purchase in these gaps, and in less time than he had expected he attained the summit of the wall. Here he paused to reach with cautious fingers so as to ascertain the positions of certain ragged sword-blades, spear-heads, cracked glass and other obstacles embedded in the ledge to dissuade an intruder. Having located these, he pulled himself upward, pushing several of the rusty defenses aside as he progressed, and glided across the few exposed feet of stone in a crouching position. The inner wall was even more eroded than the outer side; he experienced little difficulty in negotiating a descent. Easily he stood within the palace grounds. Without a sense of sacrilege, he reflected, many a thief would have been before him.

The kitchens of the palace were his first objective. At this hour he knew they would be deserted by cooks and staff. Accordingly, he proceeded in a semicircular direction toward the rear of the massive structure of the king's dwelling-place. He threaded his way through underbrush and gardens of flowers. Once he spied a carven statue so like the figure of a living man that he half drew his sword before discovering his mistake. Cursing, he set a foot in a shallow pool evidently intended for fish. This incident inflamed his temper, and he continued toward the palace with little nerves twitching in his throat and wrists. The discomfort of a soaked and dripping sandal did not decrease his anger.

A thin piece of steel, a thieves' implement expertly applied, soon forced the small kitchen door opening onto the ref-

use pits. Closing the violated barrier quietly behind him, he traversed three deserted cellars fragrant with the odors of cold meats and rich wines. A series of stone steps, moonlit through narrow apertures in the castle walls, led him to the upper floors and the long corridors and high arches of the palace halls.

Rald, like many others born in the huts that clustered the hillsides under the protection of their kingdom's castle, knew practically the entire plan of the structure's architecture through generations of village people who had rendered service within its massive walls, servants that would have gasped, terror-stricken, if they could have observed the practical use to which their idle gossip and hearsay comments were being put this night.

But the thief did not know the posts of the palace guards, so he trod carefully, dodging the thin streaks of moonlight from the narrow slits in the walls. Beyond his suppressed breathing all was quiet as the grave. If guarding spirits wished to clamor in warning alarms, they were powerless to do so, though Thrall's throne was in greater danger than it had ever been before and the fate of the Ebon Dynasty was balancing in the palms of the Seven Gods, all because of a slim, powerful, half-naked figure stealing with drawn sword through the empty corridors of Forthe's ancient palace.

At a turning in the hall the intruder suddenly halted and, in animal fashion, hunched his shoulder muscles. The sword quivered in his hand like an animate thing about to make its kill. Before him a dim shadow resolved itself into the figure of a man stretched outright upon the flagging of the paved floor. He wore the uniform of a member of the palace guards. His hands were raised far above his head, far from his sword-hilt, in close proximity to a thin-necked earthenware bottle. He breathed stertorously.

"Drunk!" exulted the thief. "Oh my king! My royal fool!" The bottle gurgled momentarily in Rald's hand. "Fair," he opined, judiciously. "Much better than some I've stolen, King Thrall!"

His eyes fell upon the carven door before which the stupefied guard lay inert. "Perhaps," he whispered softly, "perhaps *this* is the room!"

A delicate twitch of the door's lever, with an eye on the unconscious form at his feet, and he was peering into the chamber. A beam of moonlight flowed through draped tapestries to illuminate a lengthy couch holding a form undoubtedly female; the outlines were unmistakable. The shape was obvious, but the head of the figure was averted and only a smooth white cheek could be seen among the tumbled confusion of robes and cushions. Rald closed the door as silently as he had opened it.

"A mistress, perhaps. Or a wench. No —a mistress. Or why the guard?"

As noiseless as ever, his lean shadow sped down the corridor; only the appreciatively lowered liquid line of the wine-container testified that the thief of Forthe had ever come or gone.

At length he paused where two huge doors of semicircular design formed an oval indentation in the wall. The portals were plain and unmarked by even the royal heraldry; but a single bar, fitted into protruding slots on either side of the entrance, was covered by a tiny network of cabalistic writings. Rald, stooping to peer at the engraving in the dim moonlight, made out enough of its meaning to comprehend a warning bestowing the curses of the Seven Gods upon the mortal who would dare to lift the bar from its niche unless bidden to do so directly by

Thrall of the Ebon Dynasty, Keeper of the Necklace and rightful King of Forthe.

"Faith!" exclaimed Rald to himself; "if ever *my* name is written there instead of Thrall's (and *that* is a question!) there'll be a pair of six-foot guardsmen standing on either side of this door to lend the gods a hand—or a sword-arm!"

He slipped his sword into its scabbard, cautiously so that it would not rasp, and lifted both hands to the bar. Although a confirmed atheist, he felt a tingle in his nerve centers for his own daring in thus grasping a thing forbidden by the gods to human hands, and a slight chill raced down his spine as his fingers encountered the cold metal. For a moment the shadows appeared to be dancing on the stones of the wall—or was it that the walls themselves were quivering like sentient organisms?

"King Rald!" he asserted, reassuringly, and wrenched the bar from its sockets.

It felt inordinately heavy in his hands, surprizingly heavy for a piece of metal hardly thicker than the sword he swung so lightly; his heart, which had been pulsing in faster tempo for the moment, only regained its normal rate when he stood the forbidden barrier softly against the farther wall. A faint dew moistened his forehead. It was easy enough to shock the wenches of the taverns with blasphemy against the Seven, but here in the dim and time-hallowed halls of ancient Castle Forthe their dark and secret powers seemed very menacing indeed.

"*King* Rald!" he repeated, and paused, startled. Unconsciously he had spoken aloud, and the sound of his voice tearing asunder the stillness within the aged and sacred corridors caused him to crouch and quiver like a wild thing. An instant; then, superstition forgotten, he became the cynical thief again. He amended his late boast in a whisper: "*Fool* Rald!"

The oval doorway was no longer an obstacle. Before a gentle push of a hand the double doors swung inward. Rald was amazed to see the room beyond lit by three great torches stuck at intervals along the walls; so closely had the portals been fitted that not a single ray of light escaped their edges, and his abrupt transition from moonbeams to firelight left him momentarily in blinking uncertainty. Recovering, he saw that the chamber was unguarded and promptly closed the doors to prevent any unexpected gleams from alarming a chance guard.

The room was not large; it contained none of the great statues or scarred armor of long-deceased kings that obstructed so many of the public halls to remind a properly awe-stricken populace of the might of the dead. The walls were covered with fold upon fold of black velvet tapestries; bare stones appeared only where niches held the huge ironwood torches that would burn, untended, for weeks without replacement. Opposite the entrance stood a low dais supporting the carved seats of the double throne of King Thrall and his royal sister, the Lady Thrine. Here was the Inner Council chamber where foreign emissaries were interviewed, where treaties involving peace and war and politics were signed, where only the great were welcome and death was the penalty for the unbidden.

Hanging high between the cushions of the double throne and outlined in stark simplicity against the background of black velvet, its thousand facets pouring a brilliance of colors in great cascades under the flickering beams from the torches, gleamed the legendary Necklace of the Ebon Dynasty.

It was the objective of Rald's quest.

The Necklace was composed of a string of fifty diamonds, each one itself worthy of the ransom of a king, and the lot, in

their magnificent entirety, of fabulous value. But the chief virtue of the heirloom lay not in its marketable worth, but in the legendary credits supposedly bestowed upon it by the multiple blessings of the Seven Gods when, eons ago, they granted the rights of kingship to the Ancient One who had been the first King of Forthe and the subsequent founder of the dynasty. When the reigning king held serious council, or signed a treaty with a neighboring power, or on rare occasions was called upon to dispense justice upon an important trial or disagreement, he solemnly and reverently took down the gold-clasped chain of matchless diamonds and with his own hands placed them about his neck. From the decision he then rendered there could be no appeal; it became immutable and final. It was the Necklace, apparently, that gave verdict, not the man or even the king.

Hence the reasoning of Karlk, the magician: Many kings had worn the Necklace in judicial omnipotence, until the people of Forthe saw the *wearer* as a representative of the Seven Gods; if a man wore it, whether or not he bore the mark of a crown, would not that man, by the very right of his having procured the sacred authority from a lackadaisical monarch, claim the right of kingship? And what man in all Forthe possessed the daring, initiative, cunning and combined fearlessness and resourcefulness, accomplishments so necessary to the undertaking of the theft, but Rald, prince of thieves? A barbarous type, perhaps, but one who, drunk with power and recently acquired authority, should be easy handling. A magician could never be a king, he knew, over people already in fear of evil enchantments; but a clever fighting-man could hold both the throne and the loyalty of its subjects while he, Karlk, pulled strings to make the puppet dance. A beautiful dream come true, reasoned Karlk, because of flawless logic.

The thief gazed upon destiny in the shape of diamonds and dreamed a dream of magnificence, forgetting he stood sacrilegiously on forbidden ground in a castle holding torture and death for a captured criminal. The sparkle of the jewels fascinated him and he crept nearer to their dazzling beauty as a hypnotized bird approaches the maw of a deadly snake. For a moment he forgot Karlk and kingship and power. Primarily, he was a thief born and bred—and here were jewels!

THE cool voice from behind fell upon his ears as if the speaker had wielded a club.

"Greetings, oh prowler of the night! You must be either a very brave or a very foolish man to come here!"

Rald leaped instinctively, twisting in midair, and came down on his toes a full six feet from where he had been standing. When he left the floor his back had been presented to the doorway; now he confronted the intruder with drawn sword and breath hissing from between clenched teeth. No cat of the jungles could have reacted more animal-like.

"By the rump of Nargarth!" swore the newcomer with feeling. "Quit jumping like an ape!"

"Faith!" exclaimed Rald. His hand had stayed his sword-point within scant inches of a woman's breast. "Faith!"

"By the hounds of——"

"Easy!" he grinned, regaining natural composure. "Easy, or I blush!"

For a pair of seconds they surveyed each other in silence.

Rald looked upon a bravely held figure in night attire. Even the formless garment, loosely clasped about the waist by a gold-threaded belt, could not disguise the curving beauty of a flawless shape. The long white robe fell in revealing

lines to tiny feet incased in leather sandals. Her raven-black hair, unbound, framed patrician features before it cascaded in luxurious curls to the slender waist. The level eyes, serene brow and aristocratic lips cried denial to any station of servitude; here was no castle wench.

With a suddenly inspired comprehension Rald knew her, knew also a gleam in his eyes had betrayed his recognition by the lift of her firm chin. On previous occasions he had been permitted to view her stately figure from a distance as the parade of royalty passed in the streets, but now, for the first time in his checkered career, he held private audience with one of the mighty so often described to him as "his betters." But, even as realization brought a twinge of the old awe of royalty to penetrate his unlawful impulses, the thought came to Rald that, after all, this was a woman, a beautiful and brave woman, and one to be desired even if she was the Lady Thrine, sister to the King of Forthe.

Thrine saw a half-naked barbarian, powerfully built and of challenging demeanor, who had broken into the most sacred chamber of the monarchy, and her rage was boundless. She forgot any probable need of assistance from the palace retinue. Sacrilege had been performed.

"What seek you here?" she demanded, imperiously.

The sword-point poised so few inches from her breast had not wavered, she noticed, and a tiny tremor of doubt as to the wisdom of her adventure began to seep into her mind. Had it been really so delightfully intriguing—or wise—not to have alarmed the castle when she discovered the presence of an intruder? Would the temporary thrill derived from tracking the unknown through the black corridors, without summoning her brother's minions, compensate her for the eternity of death? Nerve stimulation of any kind, she decided, was so rare in Castle Forthe that perhaps the exception was worthy of the risk.

"What seek you?" she repeated, and if her voice had become a little choked it was no doubt due to the night drafts of the long passageways.

"Fame, My Lady Thrine! And fortune, too!" His sword wavered a trifle as its circling tip encompassed the Necklace on the wall, but returned almost immediately to its former threatening position.

"You would dare!" gasped Thrine. "The Necklace! No one has ever dared to think of stealing the Necklace!"

"Therefore—fame!" smiled Rald. Receiving the lady's inspired awe, he felt, was the same as if an accolade had been conferred upon him for professional skill.

"You must be an unusual thief," surmised Thrine, with half-closed eyes. "I have heard of one of great dexterity called——"

"Rald."

"Men call you Rald?"

"That—and other things!"

"You—you"—a wave of anger became again obvious in the lady's tones—"you dared, too, to enter my bedchamber?"

"Faith! Was that you?" The sword lowered an inch or two. "I understand the guard now. But I thought you a—a——"

"Yes?"

"A very beautiful woman, my Lady! And the suggested aspiration is beyond your humble subject; rare jewels, perhaps, but—the first Lady of Forthe!" Rald rolled his eyeballs skyward in condemnation.

"What a perfect rogue!" commented Thrine as if speaking to an non-existent third person. She was no longer afraid and her tones were smooth again.

For a minute there was silence in the chamber, a silence broken only by the slight hissing of the burning torches.

"It appears, my Lady Thrine, we have approached checkmate in both our enterprises," Rald declared presently. "I have the Necklace; you have me."

"You have also a sword."

"And you a beauty I cannot impair. And a voice with which to scream."

"You propose that I—scream?"

"You may decide. There may be dead men before I gain the city streets again, friends of yours you would not care to endanger——"

"If I promise you safe-conduct and freedom?"

"Pardon, my Lady! Even you could not promise safety to one who has committed the unspeakable crime of coveting the Necklace. I came for it; I shall leave with it or rest these bones for ever here."

"I will relieve her of the responsibility, King Rald," said Karlk from the semi-darkness of the doorway.

"Karlk!" exclaimed the thief.

Thrine uttered a low cry.

"King?"

"If you come through the corridors and the guards so easily, why did you seek my services?" asked Rald.

"My powers can blind the guards at the gates and still the watchdogs in their kennels. I can cause a mist over the torches and heavy sleep to the guarding spirits. But I could not raise the bar to this chamber, as I saw you do in my glass. That was the obstacle, Rald. The mere lifting of that bar made you king of Forthe!"

"And thief and traitor, too!" sneered Thrine.

Somehow her words and tone struck Rald to the heart. He looked into her icy eyes and the chill of them entered his soul.

"We can spare the lady now," said Karlk, ominously.

His slender fingers rose to the level of the woman's neck. Thrine guessed at his intent. Her fear vanished; in the face of certain death the dynasty's blood would not permit her to cringe, so she stood unafraid and defiant. There was no glint of admiration in the magician's eyes, but only intense cruelty and pleasant satisfaction. Rald, watching him, knew that the blue sparks would writhe and twist that beauteous form in another second.

"Wait!" he cried, and was surprized at the intensity, the noisy recklessness, of his own voice.

"Hold!" commanded sterner tones. From the shadows beyond the black-robed figure of Karlk, where the forgotten portals swung wide, a slender sword-tip flickered through the air to rest at the magician's throat.

"By the Seven!" swore Rald. "Does none sleep in this cursed palace?"

"Only my precious guardsmen, it seems!" declared the latest arrival in deep and bitter tones.

The man moved into the torchlight as he spoke, and the sudden wild glitterings of a thousand steel corners on his fighting-mail danced on the black tapestries. His head was bare and proudly borne. The hawk-like features, level gray eyes, thin nostrils and dominant chin were familiar to the thief, whose own countenance paled.

"King Thrall!"

"By your leave, my unknown and unannounced guest!" The king's sword did not wander from its threatening position behind Karlk's head. "Or rather: guests! What do you desire now, my infamous magician?"

Despite his surprize the black-robed figure held himself quietly. He did not attempt to face the king; a sword-

prick that stung the skin had warned him, wordlessly. One thin-fingered hand absently stroked the tangled beard, and the heavy-rimmed eyelids were discreetly lowered. Even the watchful gaze of Rald could discern nothing dangerous in the wizard's attitude.

From beyond the king's menacing figure two burly guardsmen, eyes still bloodshot from deep slumber, cautiously approached the tense body of the thief. He had never been forcibly disarmed before; he shrank a little as the sword and small dagger in his belt were appropriated. Thrine smiled maliciously and, partly to his own astonishment, he smiled back. He admired the Lady Thrine, her calm air and the coolness of her tongue, and was glad the death sparks had not had a chance to shatter her lovely body.

Her smile faded. A strange shadow crossed her expressive features. Was it sympathy?

"I have endured you a long time, oh Karlk!" Thrall was saying. "The meaning of tonight's entry is not quite clear to me. I mean to discover it. We will see what magic can prevail against the steel and wooden posts of my so seldom used torture rooms beneath us. Unless you wish to speak now?"

"My king," said Karlk in respectful tones, "I have ever been misunderstood."

"You have. Human minds cannot comprehend men changed into half-beasts or men with beast-like habits. Because of the powers you wielded I forbore a long time, but now, for some as yet incomprehensible reason, you have invaded a very private chamber of Castle Forthe, wherein you have no rights, and the time has come for a definite easing of my mind. You will keep those wizard-hands of yours in plain sight and you will not speak or sign to this underling of yours, or I cut off your hands and his head without benefit of trial!"

"I am no underling!" spat Rald, wrathfully.

"Without a head, who could tell?" observed a guardsman.

"Ho! And who might you be, appearing as you are, clad as a new-born babe?" demanded Thrall.

"I am Rald!" Even before the king the pride of the thief was stronger than the fear of punishment.

Thrine watched him as he stood between his captors, half naked, weaponless, but erect in defense of his own integrity, and marveled.

"Rald!" exclaimed Thrall. "I've heard of you. So have my guards." His eyes flickered over the two abashed men guarding the captive, both of whom were now wide awake and intently watching the least movement made by the man between them. "Hitherto they never seem to have been so close to your person. My guards, you understand, have such strenuous tasks to perform, their minds, as well as their bodies, become fatigued with the passing of the day. From the drinking of wines and the entertainment of the kitchen maids they must seek their much-deserved repose."

With flame-colored cheeks the two guards stood at attention. Rald grinned at each of them, and the fires mounted even higher beneath their skins.

"Truly enterprising fellows, my king! You can perhaps perceive why I follow my less exhausting profession?"

"I beg a private audience, oh king!" broke in Karlk in a humble voice.

"Later, wizard," said Thrall, curtly. "Frake," he commanded, "see that my two guests are bound tightly to prevent their roving inclinations from leading them astray within my walls."

Hasty footsteps were heard as three more men in the livery of the king's guardsmen entered, with eyes wide before

the tableau. Speechless, they waited for orders.

"I wish to extend my hospitality in greater measure," continued the king, "when I have returned from my duties as temporary captain of the guard. My former captain appears to have obtained a stronger wine than any of you—by the circumstantial evidence of his absence. I, myself, will make the rounds this night, before a handful of beggars from the city's gutters decide to take Forthe!"

SPURRED by the king's anger and shamed before his sarcasm, the guardsman Frake, with hastily procured twine, venomously bound Rald's wrists so tightly that the thief was forced to set his teeth to abstain from wincing. The magician was tied likewise, hand and foot, but handled in a respectful manner not accorded to the other prisoner. In the opinion of the guardsmen the slight figure of Karlk was far more dangerous than the formidable bulk of the fighting-man; it was evident by the clumsy efforts they made to bind the former without touching his person.

"Go, my sister, to your rooms," ordered Thrall. "I will leave these miscreants here until I discover what other sacrileges they may have committed, or if there be accomplices in the gardens. Perhaps I may even be so presumptuous as to awaken a few of my guards and inquire if there is a pilgrimage being made through the palace grounds!"

As Thrine passed through the doorway in the wake of the wrathful king, she glanced hurriedly over her shoulder at the supine figure of the thief. Rald, tightly secured, lay with the manner of a man reposing on his honestly earned couch, his head pillowed against the velvet of the wall. Outrageously, he winked. With a strange mixture of emotions Lady Thrine swept in royal dignity to her rooms, pausing only to break the wine bottle by her door over the slumbering guard's head.

In the chamber of the double throne the two prisoners looked at each other and then at the gleaming jewels upon the wall that were to have given one power and the other a kingdom.

"We are both to blame," Karlk announced presently, in his curiously effeminate tones. "I should have sensed Thrall behind me before his weapon touched my neck. You should have run your sword through the woman's body at once, and seized the Necklace, before you condescended to argue."

"I am a thief!" protested Rald, angrily, "not a murderer!"

"Many have died for a throne before," said Karlk softly. His beady eyes were searching the thief's features, penetrating, it seemed to Rald, his very thoughts. "Many — and quite a number were women!"

For the first time in his careless career Rald was stung by a feeling of patriotism, a sense of dutiful homage to the crown that protected the city and countryside, including himself, from the depredations of mountain bandits and greedy rulers of neighboring domains.

"I am of Forthe! I could not slay the sister of our king!"

"Ha!" The magician shrugged weary shoulders. "I must learn, in dealing with men, that they are prone to sentimentality. I have studied so far above mankind that my thoughts are in the clouds while insects destroy my sandals. Even a thief has scruples!"

"If I had a sword I'd have your ears, also!" murmured Rald, thoughtfully.

The next instant he sustained a shock such as he had never experienced before in all his varied existence—which had been wide, indeed. Karlk had been lying, as motionless as himself, against the

opposite wall where he had been placed after being bound by the guards. His hands were tied behind his back, even as Rald's, in a most uncomfortable manner. Now the wizard squirmed, moving into a more upright position, and from the folds on either side of his black robes, from the spaces below his armpits, appeared two tiny, white-furred arms. The extraordinary appendages were only a foot and a half in length and terminated in small, child-like hands with short nails and pinkish palms. Except for the white hirsute growth they might have been the paws of a monkey. With nimble digits they began to pick on Karlk's bonds.

Rald swore fiercely in amazed horror. It was one of the few times in his life he was to feel the numbing cold of stark fear in his veins.

"There are many things about myself," explained the magician, placidly, "that no man has ever known. By force of circumstance, you are now perceiving one of my —ah—inhuman qualities. I do not like to revert frequently to these characteristics; the task becomes a strain on even my abnormal mentality. But you must agree that the situation demands a drastic remedy."

Nonplussed, Rald watched the unhuman fingers pluck apart the cords until Karlk's hands were freed. Once their task was completed they disappeared swiftly into the black garments and the magician's more natural fingers loosened the ropes about his ankles.

"I fear," he said, standing somberly before the thief, "I shall have to leave you here for the while. You obviously do not approve of the methods to which I have been restricted. Thrall must die—yes, and Thrine also! That the death of the reigning royalty was necessary to my project I knew from the beginning; no member of the Ebon Dynasty would voluntarily surrender the throne while there was breath in his or her body. Neither kingdoms nor dynasties are founded without the spilling of blood. So they die. Later, I will return—so that you and I may talk. Meanwhile you will observe the Necklace and contemplate the power it can bequeath you."

With a swish of silken robes the Thing that was known as Karlk vanished through the doorway, leaving a stillness broken only by the slight hissing of the torches and the heavy breathing of a semi-stupefied thief beneath the double throne.

RALD did not meditate long. His thoughts were already too jumbled to reach any definite decision. A single, blank glance was all the famous Necklace received; the knowledge of the Lady Thrine's peril submerged all thoughts of Thrall, the kingdom of Forthe, or the fabulous jewels. Diamonds, after all, were only stones, and Thrine was flesh and blood; therefore, far more perishable.

It took him fully ten minutes to hoist his tightly bound figure upright by clutching at the tapestries with benumbed fingers and digging his heels into the tiny crevices of the stone floor. Only an able-bodied man at the height of physical fitness could have accomplished the feat. At last he stood, panting and perspiring, beneath one of the hissing torches. Taking a deep breath, he flung his bowed head up and backward. The abrupt motion caused him to lose his hard-won balance, and he fell full-length and somewhat painfully back to the pavement. But the torch, knocked from its niche, fell also, and landed with a shower of sparks that singed off an eyelash before the thief could twist his head. Luckily, it did not go out. Rald murmured an almost forgotten prayer.

A short while later he cast the cords from his ankles and chafed a pair of

badly burned wrists. It had not been an easy matter to hold his hands, so awkwardly fastened behind him, over the sputtering flame. If his hand could only hold a sword!

Aye, a sword! The empty scabbard was a mockery. With supple tread and cautious ears he left the chamber of the Necklace with its treasure, still untouched, on the wall. Castle Forthe held plenty of swords; all he must do was find one without an arm behind it!

His wish was instantly, but ominously, granted. A few paces down the dim corridor, in a curiously crumpled position, lay the body of a guard. A shaft of moonlight from an interstice crossed features distorted in violent and horrible death-pangs. Rald shuddered as he remembered the blue sparks and their supernatural force. The dead man's blade was half drawn; the thief appropriated it in a single cat-like gesture. Somewhere in the dark halls of Forthe was a Thing without the need of a sword, but Rald felt courage flowing into his heart through the chilled steel in his hand. Despite the blisters on his palm he clutched the hilt as a drowning man grasps at a rescuing timber.

From somewhere, out of the darkness, came the half-muffled cry of a woman. The slender thread of alarm in Rald's spine flowered into a network of nerve pulsations spreading into his heart regions. Thrine! The voice was unmistakable. Blindly he blundered into stone walls as he encountered a sudden turn in the passageway; recovering, he realized his senses had been blurred by the inner urge driving him forward. He sought to conquer his impulses. A cool head and a strong sword-arm were needed in Forthe this night.

An unexpected twist of the corridor revealed to his eyes a high, unfortified archway of stone leading into the palace gardens. Beyond, and converging toward the aperture, were the numerous torches carried by the guardsmen as they beat the foliage in vain for lurking assassins. Near by, at the very base of the short stairway leading up to the arch, King Thrall advanced before a picked dozen of his retinue. Evidently, the monarch of Forthe was returning to question the apprehended culprits.

But the king was in no position to see what was so clearly visible to the thief. Between Rald and the wavering gleams of the torches, just far enough within the castle archway to be concealed in the shadows from those without, crouched the figure of Karlk in an attitude unmistakably threatening. His face was toward the approaching soldiers led by Thrall; the thief knew a king was walking to his death. On the floor, at the wizard's feet, a bound figure attempted to warn the innocent victims with wild outcries that only ended in faint mews behind the cloth thrust into her mouth. A dynasty neared its end under the thief's gaze.

An animal-like snarl was stifled in Rald's throat. With unreasonable inconsistency he ignored his own capture of Lady Thrine such a short while ago, when he had held his sword-tip to her breast; Karlk had dared to lay hands on this woman!

If the magician would have but glanced over his shoulder he would have seen the torchlight glittering on the naked steel, but his eyes were occupied with the advancing soldiery. Slowly his fingers rose to their chest levels.

SOME sixth-sense of premonition awakened in the king. He paused with one foot on the top step, a hand on his sword, and sought to peer into the obscurity of the passage. "Who is there?" he asked, as the guardsmen halted uncertainly behind him.

"Your destiny, oh Thrall!" laughed Karlk. "Can you die like a king?"

Thrilled with his supremacy, obsessed with revengeful hatred of the dynasty and its ruler, and seething with concealed fury over his recent treatment, the magician was oblivious to any possible danger from his rear until the swift patter of racing sandals warned him—too late. Even then, he half turned from his proposed victim before the bright steel, swung in a mighty arc, struck down to shear his right arm from his side and sheathe itself deep in the ribs. Shrieking, he fell, to writhe on the stone flags.

Rald looked at his sword. It was no longer bright. "Damned wizard!" he said.

"Wait!" cried Thrall, as several guards converged about the thief with ready swords. "There is something here I do not understand! Surround him but do him no harm—yet!"

Grimly, the king slashed Thrine's bonds and extracted the cloth from her mouth. In a second her lithe form was upright and within the circle of menacing steel about the prisoner. Gaping in bewilderment, the men lowered their weapons.

"Rald saved your life, brother! All your lives, I think!"

"Aye!" groaned the dying magician through clenched teeth. "With his own sword the fool dethroned himself!"

"If ever I seek a throne again," growled the thief, "I'll do it with steel and not with magical death from accursed hands held on helpless men! You promised me a cleaner triumph, wizard! Why did you not let me fight as a man should?"

"Karlk is not a man!" exclaimed Lady Thrine.

"No—not as you know men," agreed Rald. He shuddered, thinking of the weird scene in the room where he had been a prisoner. "Perhaps he never was."

"Of course he never was! Tear off the disguise!"

King and thief and awed guardsmen stared at the Thing weltering in its blood on the stone flags. No one made an effort to touch the dying form; the horror and chill of intense malignancy penetrated the nerves of the boldest. They stared in silence, but no man moved.

"Must I perform my own tasks?" demanded Thrine, imperiously.

Her answer came from Karlk alone: "No, my Lady! You discovered my secret when I seized you, did you not?"

Weakly, with fumbling fingers, the remaining hand grasped at the shaggy beard, and a cry of amazement arose from all save Thrine as the entire mass of hair came off to disclose the pale, oval features *of a woman!* The convulsive effort threw back the black hood, and long, raven-black ringlets fell forth to spread about the ashen cheeks.

"By the Seven!" swore Thrall. "A woman!"

"Partly," answered Karlk. The wizard's—or witch's—eyes were beginning to glaze. "And — partly — something else."

One of the slender, white-furred arms came from its concealment beneath the dark folds and dipped into the spreading pool of blood. The guardsmen cried out in amazed terror; one dropped his torch and fled. Thrine shrank against Rald's side; only the instinctive habits of royal self-control kept her on her feet.

"Be not so horrified, Thrall!" admonished the tortured lips. "Your own regal blood, from the veins of an Ebon princess, flows on the stones this night!"

"Blasphemer! What distorted brain in a disfigured body gives you such wild——"

"I have lived many times the life-period of man," interrupted Karlk. Her

voice was gentler now; more in keeping with the femininity of the patrician features. "I saw your grandfathers born, oh king, and I cursed them, one and all, as I prepared for this day, upon which I have so badly failed. Trusting, as I did, in a mortal man to lift the bar from the sacred chamber of the Necklace—I allowed my own tool to turn its edge upon me. Oh Nargarth, guardian Demon! To lie here helpless while the powers I hold drain out of me with my life-blood—strength it took centuries to garner!"

"Why? Why covet my kingdom?" asked Thrall. "There are many others."

"But *I* am of the Ebon blood! I belong, in part, to the double throne! Remember, in your legends, when the great white apes of Sorjoon were so numerous, before the outraged people hunted them down to death from the high crags whereon they dwelt—how at times they even dared to assault the city's walls and drag off screaming wretches to their ghastly feasts? On one terrible day a princess of Forthe became a captive. She did not immediately—participate in the cannibal orgies. She was — my mother."

KARLK'S voice grew momentarily weaker; the stunned listeners bent to catch the low whispers as her choked breath struggled in the distorted form.

"The nether arms—are miniature replicas of my father's. You understand?"

Thrine moaned and clung to Rald's bare forearm, forgetting he was a thief and she a royal lady.

"I cursed all men—all human races! I was a monstrosity unfit for existence, of no class or race. I fled the apes as I fled mankind. I hated every living thing, for none was like me. I was alone. In my solitude I learned from the demons of the forests—and the mountains—they did not shun my deformities! If you enter—my house—you will see the results of my well-learned lessons, oh Thrall! I hope they drive you mad!"

"No man shall enter the accursed walls," muttered the king. "Your house will be burned and the remaining stones ground to dust!"

"My — poor — experiments! I had planned—many more. Remember—the one that barked? Ha! And he with the pointed skull—who giggled?"

Thrall half raised his blade to smite the prone ape-woman, but malicious, rasping laughter held him transfixed.

"No need, oh king—and brother! My day is gone—the tide ebbs. Would that —I might—wreak some evil fate upon you—ere Nargarth's minions come for me!"

A cold wind burst forth suddenly amid the quiet night breezes, swirling through the passageway and tugging at the torch flares so hard that several were extinguished. Icy, unseen fingers appeared to wrench at their clothing. Thrine screamed. As abruptly as the chilling gust of air had come, it departed, leaving a numbed cluster of humans and a curiously shriveled and for ever silent Thing crumpled on the stones. Karlk and all her ambitions had passed to the Outer Void.

For a long minute the king and his guards remained in statuesque poses; then Thrall, his warrior spirits gaining ascendancy as they were freed of supernatural awe, uttered a mighty roar.

"Rald! My friend! My brother! I'll make you a baron! For this night's work you'll own the richest farms of Forthe! I'll—*where is Rald?*"

Thrine laughed, shakily, and pointed

to the shrubbery of the gardens. Clusters of foliage were still quivering from the hasty passage of some moving object.

"Rald!" shouted the king. There was no answer; the leafy tangles stilled and became motionless. "I meant him no harm—nor punishment, though he desired my throne. Why——"

"He chose to go," said Thrine, complacently, "so he went."

"Well, we need have no fear of his practising his profession in the castle, henceforth. Paradoxically, though a thief he is still an honest one. Now that we are in his debt he will not take advantage of it. I know men!"

Thrine laughed.

"You may be wise in the manner of honor among kings and men, oh my brother, but how little you know of their hearts! Some day—Rald will be back!"

"After fleeing? Back? For what?"

"O king without eyes! For me, of course!"

To Virgil Finlay

Upon his Drawing for Robert Bloch's Tale, "The Faceless God"

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

In dim abysses pulse the shapes of night,
  Hungry and hideous, with strange miters crowned;
Black pinions beating in fantastic flight
  From orb to orb through soulless voids profound.
None dares to name the cosmos whence they course,
  Or guess the look on each amorphous face,
Or speak the words that with resistless force
  Would draw them from the halls of outer space.

Yet here upon a page our frightened glance
  Finds monstrous forms no human eye should see;
Hints of those blasphemies whose countenance
  Spreads death and madness through infinity.
What limner he who braves black gulfs alone
  And lives to wake their alien horrors known?

Jail-Break

By PAUL ERNST

Littell wanted to escape from prison, but the aftermath of his escape was far worse than the prison itself

HE HAD to make the break soon. He would die in here if he didn't. He was used to fine food, good clothes, luxuries; used to women in evening gowns, and cigars at fifty cents, and soft beds and softly upholstered cars. He couldn't stand the harsh and terrible life of prison. He had to get out of here soon. Please God it would be now, tonight. . . .

Well, it *would* be tonight! Wasn't everything all ready for it? Then what was he worrying about?

Alfred Littell stood by the small barred window of his cell. But it wasn't barred any more—at least not as the architect had designed it. The center bar was out, neatly sawed at top and bottom, just now removed. The way was clear from this grim cubicle into the prison yard.

Littell shivered as he looked out. Plenty of reasons to shiver. One was that he was stripped to the skin, and the night was cold. A naked plump form in the dimness, he shrank from the breeze seeping in. Another was the sight of that prison yard; brilliantly lighted, surrounded by a twenty-foot stone wall whose top was set with towers at regular intervals. In the towers were guards with machine-guns ready to mow down anyone mad enough to try to cross the yard and scale the walls in the glare of the searchlights. A third reason was—the stuff which was supposed to enable him to cross that yard and scale that wall unharmed.

Fantastic stuff! Incredible! Given to him by Harley, who hated him as few men have ever learned to hate.

It was because Harley hated him so, that Littell had snatched at the possibilities of truth in the mad business. From no other man would he have accepted such a remedy, nor have dreamed of trying it, no matter how desperate his urge to escape from prison. But Harley's hatred made it plausible.

He had heard of it in a roundabout way, from a cellmate he'd had a short while ago when the prison was overcrowded.

"Old Doc Harley says he has a sure way of crushing out of here."

"How?"

"He won't tell. But he says it's certain."

That was all. Littell hadn't permitted his interest to show. But he had thought a lot.

Doctor Harley was a brilliant man. Before the judge had sentenced him to twenty years and Littell to life, he had been a famous bacteriologist and biologist, a man of great intellect. The wonder was not that he had discovered a way to break jail, but that he hadn't discovered it sooner.

There was the guarded talk in the prison yard a few weeks later.

"I hear you've hit on a way out of here, Harley."

Harley's eyes were contemptuous gray ice as they rested on Littell's face.

"You slinking rat!"

For his was a hatred almost sublime in

"He would simply stand there, blending with the trees."

its scope. That, Littell knew, was because the plan he had evolved had not quite succeeded. A little slip. One any man might make. And it had seemed a risk anyone would take, when the stakes were considered.

Half a million dollars! That was the heritage Littell would have split if the murder of his ward, Elizabeth Moore, had gone undetected. And God knows it should have succeeded. Littell could still glow when he thought of the subtlety of the plan.

The sub-microscopic germs of psittacosis, a thing most people couldn't even pronounce, let alone understand. Dread virus of the parrot disease that could kill like a flaming sword, but subtly, undetectably. A virus obtained through Doctor Harley, eminent Government authority, whose daughter had secretly disgraced herself to such a degree that Harley could be blackmailed into anything through fear of her exposure. Death for Elizabeth Moore; half a million dollars almost in the hand.

And then they had been caught.

"Don't keep thinking it was my fault we were tripped up," he said urgently. "It was just bad luck——"

"It isn't because we were caught that I could cheerfully see you burned at the

stake. It's because you found the one way to force me into the hellish business in the first place. But I suppose you wouldn't understand that. You abysmal scum!"

LITTELL had to take it. If he didn't get out of this place of stone and steel and brute-faced guards soon he would go mad. And in Harley lay the possibility, according to his cellmate.

He had looked furtively around to make sure none could hear.

"MacQueen says you have a way of escape."

The gray ice of Harley's eyes had lightened at that. He had laughed, long and loud, for the first time since the walls of the penitentiary enclosed him.

"Ssh!" Littell had said frantically. "You'll attract attention——"

"What of it? So you heard about that, did you? And you come crawling to me for further details. To *me!* That's good."

Words, laugh and look had stung like whips. But Littell would have taken anything with the possibility of a jail-break in sight.

"You *have* a way out, Harley?"

"Wouldn't you like to know!"

That was all for that day.

Littell kept after the hawk-eyed man. He believed Harley did have a way out. Prisons aren't built to confine minds like Harley's.

But for maddening day after maddening day, Harley only laughed at him when he cringed up to him in the prison yard. Then had come the day when he looked at Littell with savagely thoughtful eyes.

"By God, it would serve you right if I told you."

Quick! Catch him up on it!

"Why? Is there a catch to it?" Littell had fawned.

"A catch? That's a weak word, scum. There's hell in it such as a brain like yours couldn't comprehend."

"But *what* is it, Harley? What's your way out of here?"

For answer, only the maddening laugh that drew the eyes of guards and other prisoners alike. Drew their eyes, and also answering grins. For all there knew how Harley loathed the big soft man with the paunch who had killed a girl with the virus of psittacosis.

"I'll bet it isn't sure after all, Harley."

"You know damned well it is." Harley's amused, icy eyes drilled Littell's bloodshot brown ones. "You know I've got brains enough to figure a way out."

"If it's sure, why don't you use it yourself?"

"I told you. There's hell in it. Personally I'd rather stay here than face the consequences of that particular escape."

"Consequences worse than—this?" Littell had chattered hysterically, staring around at the grim yard.

"Decidedly worse," nodded Harley, icy, amused.

"What?" begged Littell. "What are the consequences?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

More maddening days. And then Littell had hit upon the method of prying Harley's secret from him. The brain that had thought of parrot's disease as a murder method was keen enough to find a way out here. It lay through the man's hatred.

"Maybe your way of escape would be painful, or something. But what do you care? I'm the one who would be facing these consequences you talk about. And you certainly aren't interested in sparing me any grief."

Harley's laugh had not rung out, for once. Again that bitterly thoughtful look had slid into his gray eyes.

"Maybe it isn't as bad as you think," urged Littell.

"I don't think—I know."

"I'll take a chance. And you can find out from my reaction whether you could try it yourself."

"I have tried it—enough to get a hint of the aftermath. Just a little as an experiment. I tell you, prison is better."

"Let me judge that for myself."

"By God—it *would* serve you right——"

It had worked, slowly but certainly. Harley had come around, not, Littell knew well enough, because he was willing to help him, but because the brilliant doctor saw a way of revenge.

Harley had told him. And the thing he told had made Littell question his sanity, at first.

"You know what a chameleon is, scum?"

"Sure. A little lizard that changes color to match whatever it's resting on."

"Aren't you the cunning rat! Yes. A lizard of the genus *Chamæleo*. I worked with 'em in the Government lab. I isolated the hormone which causes their pigmentation to change color. I went further. Just before you forced me into the sweet-smelling scheme which deservedly sent us here, I reproduced this hormone synthetically, with common chemicals."

"Well?" Littell had said, frowning perplexedly.

"Well, rat. A chameleon could crawl out of here pretty easily, couldn't it? If it took on the color of these stone walls, a guard wouldn't see it crawling up one of them, would he?"

The thing was so fantastic that it had taken a little while for Littell to grasp it. But long before the next yard period, he was burning and shivering to talk to Harley again.

"You mean you've got some stuff that will make you invisible if you take it? So you can walk out of here?"

"Not invisible, scum. The color of whatever background you have, that's all. And it's not too perfect."

"What is it? A sort of drug you swallow that gives you chameleon qualities?"

Harley had nodded, eyes savage, bitterly undecided.

"But my God, Harley, that's tremendous! Why don't you use it?"

No answer.

"Those mysterious consequences of yours?"

A slow nod.

"The hormones are odd things, Littell. We have isolated many of them, and some we can reproduce. But they're of the stuff of life, and still essentially unknown. This particular one does something to you besides making your skin pigmentation change to match your background. Some terrible freedom of the mind, perhaps. Some sixth sense which opens up—and which should for ever remain a blind spot."

"I don't understand."

"Neither do I, rat. But there you are."

"*What* does it do besides changing pigmentation?"

"You see things." The icy gray eyes were staring at Littell's face—but obviously not observing it.

THAT was all Littell could get out of him. You saw things. It was a way out of prison. But its aftermath was supposed to be horrible.

Littell went to the prison library and read all he could find on chameleons, particularly *Chamæleo vulgaris*. The faculty that lizard possesses of changing color, he was informed, was due to the presence of contractile, pigment-bearing cells placed at varying depths in the skin.

Hell, the human body didn't have contractile cells. Or—did it? Pigment-bearing, yes. He knew that. But were they contractile, whatever that meant? Was

human skin so made as to react to such an agent as that described by Harley—assuming the man hadn't been simply amusing himself by working up his hopes on a hoax?

The more Littell studied it, the less he could determine. And of course he dared ask no one who might know. You don't advertise an escape.

"Have you got any of this stuff in here with you, Harley?"

"No, scum."

"Then how——"

"It could easily be made. The ingredients could be gotten from the prison hospital. Potassium manganate is the base."

Littell didn't sleep nights. Harley was grimly kidding him! Or was he? Human flesh wasn't like lizard flesh! Or, in respect to contractile, pigment-bearing cells, was it? You couldn't actually break jail by taking a drug! Or—could you?

What was the secondary effect produced by Harley's drug? What horror lay in the thing that the man wouldn't use it himself, and was bleakly amused to offer it to the fellow prisoner whom he hated most on earth?

Littell shuddered away from the mystery, and decided to forget the whole thing. And then, in the dining-hall, he tried to sneak meat from the plate of the man beside him. It took a lot to support that soft paunch of his. The man beat him up till he was a quivering, groaning mass before the guards could intervene.

"I've got to get out of here! I've got to! I can't stand it!"

He sought again the man who loathed the ground he walked on.

"Harley, I don't care what your drug does to a man. I don't care what the aftermath is. Let me have some. There's a hack-saw blade in my cell, stuck with chewing-gum in the angle-iron of the side rail of my bunk. I can get out of my cell, if there's a way for me to get across the prison yard and up the outer wall after that. . . . Harley, give me some of that drug."

"You fool!"

"Maybe I am a fool. But I can't stay here any longer."

"You know I hate you. Yet you'll take a concoction from me and swallow it, after I've told you the results are such that I wouldn't think of taking it myself?"

"I've got to get out of here!"

Across the yard, the man from whom Littell had tried to steal food snarled at him. Littell's soft flesh crawled with memory of the beating he had taken.

"I've got to get away!"

Then the day when Harley, with ferocious mockery in his eyes, slid a little vial of blood-colored liquid into his hand. Harley was occasionally called to the prison hospital to help with cases that baffled the regular physician. It had been easy for him to get what he needed.

"Here you are, scum. Escape—if you're fool enough to take it. But remember, there are some things worse than the penitentiary."

"Nothing could be worse! I'll risk whatever may happen to me—afterward."

There were directions, delivered like the vial: in bitter mockery.

"Wait for a foggy night. This stuff isn't perfect. And it goes without saying that you must take your clothes off and go naked. Otherwise the guards would be treated to the spectacle of a seemingly empty suit of prison denim walking across the yard. The drug doesn't act on hair, either, but the prison hair-cut takes care of that, I guess. You're actually going through with it, Littell?"

"I am. If I'm caught, I'll get solitary for a little while, that's all. They can't extend a sentence when it's already life."

"You keep overlooking the main point, rat. That is, the aftermath of taking this hormone."

"You'd love to see me lose my nerve and stay in here for the rest of my life—with a way out in my hand, wouldn't you?" flared Littell. "To hell with your aftermath!" He didn't have to take Harley's lip any longer. He'd got what he wanted out of him. "And to hell with you—no, no. I don't mean that."

For it had suddenly occurred to him that Harley could still spoil the thing. All he had to do was speak to the warden.

But Harley hadn't spoken to anyone. And this unnerved him, too. The man actually wanted him to do it. Escape—this way—must be horrible indeed. . . .

HORRIBLE or not, he was going through with it. So now he stood in his cell, by the window with the bar sawn out, shivering in the cold night breeze, naked and ready to go. He had swallowed the contents of the little vial. Rather awful pain. Convulsions. Then clear-headedness and a sense of giddy lightness. He looked eagerly down at his naked arm. Had the stuff really worked?

The arm stood out white in the dimness, perfectly apparent. He knew an awful moment when he was convinced that the whole thing was only an elaborate, cruel hoax after all. Quite in line with Harley's hatred of him.

But wait. His body was supposed to take on the coloring of his background, and he was holding it out in empty air. He had got up from his bunk, walked to the wall, and laid his arm against it.

And cold sweat broke out all over his naked body. He could still see it, white and distinct against the stone.

He had fallen to the cold floor on his knees, with his face in his hands and his breath whistling out of distended nostrils. A grim jest of Harley's after all. . . .

The guard for this cell block had walked past, light flashing carelessly in. The rays had fallen squarely on Littell. He had waited dully for the guard to order him back to his bunk, for the rays to flash higher and reveal the bar he had sawn before swallowing the blood-red fluid. And the guard had passed on without saying a word.

It was all right, then. God in heaven, it was all right. He could see himself, but somehow others couldn't see him. The effect of the drug must have included the pigmentation of his eyes in some odd way that let him see that which others could not. . . .

What had Harley said? "You see things——"

He shoved that out of his mind as he stood naked before the window. First get out of here. Then worry about the consequences brought in the train of the draft.

The fog outside whirled more thickly. It was thin at best; only wisps here and there. But Littell hadn't had the patience to wait for a foggier night. He drew himself with difficulty through the all-too-narrow aperture opened by the removed bar.

It wasn't till he was hanging outside the cell window that the most fearful thought of all occurred to him.

What if that stuff was only colored water? What if the man who hated him had gone to these lengths to build up in his mind a baseless dependence on its powers? What if he really hung here as a human body in full view of any guard who cared to see, instead of as a chameleon-like mass melting into the background of stone?

That would be a sardonic joke to Harley. To stuff him full of scientific poppycock, placing him here as a helpless target for machine-gun bullets.

The nerves of his back crawled as he

hung there against the wall with the floodlights full on him. He could fairly feel slugs tearing into him from the watch towers. Of course he was visible. The guard who had flashed his light on him must have seen him after all and have passed on indifferently, thinking he was praying. He was going to die. . . .

But no slugs came. He hung there for what seemed two full minutes, with the light strong on him, and no shots sounded out.

He dropped. It was fifteen feet to the yard pavement. Strong chance of a broken leg. But he had not dared to make a rope of bedding. That would show against the wall, even if he did not.

He stood blinking, with the dazzling lights on him. He couldn't seem to see fog wisps at all, now, though they had been apparent from his window. Those lights! Surely, surely he would be seen. Then fog shreds swirled once more.

He walked slowly across the courtyard toward the high outer wall. Perhaps if he walked like that, instead of making a dash for it, he would be hailed instead of shot at once.

But still no slugs came. And he began to thrill wildly with a sense of achievement. He was going to make it! Harley's drug was all he claimed it to be! There was no chance of a mistake now—no living thing could have crossed that yard as he was crossing it, unless it was hidden by the chameleon-like power of taking on the absolute tint of the paving-stone over which he moved!

He looked up at the nearest tower. Distinctly he could see the guard in there, gun slung across his arm. The guard wasn't looking right at him, but he was gazing in his direction, and he made no sign.

Littell got to the wall, keeping as much as possible in the thin fog swirls that danced slowly over the courtyard almost like slowly dancing wraiths.

The wall was made of rough stone. A glance could tell that a desperate man might ascend that wall, clinging fly-like to the slight roughnesses. That didn't matter. The warden didn't worry about the walls. Not with those towers spaced on them, and the vigilant machine-gunners.

He'd worry about them from now on, Littell exulted, as he clung with grasping fingertips and bare toes for his first step up. There were going to be a lot of escapes over these walls. For he had it already worked out in his mind. He would pay Harley for the formula of this stuff, and then sell the drug to other prisoners who wanted to break out.

He had started his slow and painful ascent between two towers. But the roughnesses making ascent possible slanted toward the tower on the left. Littell began to know fear again as he drew near that tower and the top of the wall at the same time. He had come a long way, in powerful light, without being seen. But Harley had admitted that the drug was not perfect.

He searched over and over again for possible handholds away from the tower. But the only ones offering a chance were inevitably in that direction. . . .

"Hey!"

The voice of the guard in the near tower rang out as Littell had his hands over the top of the wall. Littell froze there, heart hammering, sweat freezing on his body. He caught a ragged sob behind closed lips before the sound could betray him. To get so far, and then be caught. . . .

He hung there, as motionless as—as a chameleon in the light. But no chattering shots followed the challenge. Only awful silence in which Littell could fairly feel the gaze of the guard on him. Then,

from the next tower, came a voice: "What's the matter, Pete?"

"I thought I saw something move on the wall," said the near guard. "Looked like a guy climbing. But I don't see it now. Guess it was the fog—or else I'm nuts."

For minutes Littell hung there. Then nearing exhaustion warned him that he must move again. He wasn't made for this kind of thing. He wasn't trained for it. His body was soft with fat living on the income from Elizabeth Moore's fortune, which he had handled till she was twenty-one.

He drew himself slowly up to the top of the wall, lay there till he saw the near guard look in the opposite direction, and then rolled across. There, he hung by his hands and dropped. An even longer drop than the one from his cell window. But he was free! *Free!*

He could have shouted and sung. But he did neither. He ran. He ran till his lungs were bursting, through the outlying street of the small town in which the penitentiary was located. He had to get clothes, now, and get away from here before the cell block guard sauntered by on his next round and saw an empty cell. . . .

A WOMAN was coming toward him along the deserted sidewalk. Littell abruptly slowed his pace. He hadn't seen her before. She must have turned suddenly out of one of the houses lining the street. The walk had seemed empty, then —there she was.

He started to race across the street, then remembered the fantastic thing that protected him.

He stepped to a big tree beside the walk, and leaned against the rough bark. He would simply stand there, blending with the tree, till she had passed.

She came closer, walking slowly but evenly. In spite of his knowledge of the way he was shielded, Littell shrank back against the tree bole.

She came up to where he stood, and stopped there. She half turned on the walk till she was facing him. And she looked squarely at him.

Looked squarely at him. And *saw* him! After ten terrible seconds Littell knew that. There was no mistaking the comprehension of her level gaze.

And then he saw who the woman was, and all else was lost in that tremendous realization. Scream after scream struggled to his lips and burst soundlessly there, unable to tear free.

"Murderer!" said the woman.

And her face was the face of murdered Elizabeth Moore!

"IT BEATS me," said the warden, standing with the cell block guard and the prison doctor in Littell's cell. "He had the bar all sawed and ready for an attempted escape. And then he commits suicide by swallowing that stuff. What did you say it was?"

"Strychnin, mainly," said the doctor. "I suppose he got it from the prison hospital."

"All ready to try to crush out, and he takes strychnin," repeated the warden. "Maybe he took one look at the way the yard was lighted, realized he hadn't the guts to try a break for the wall, and downed the poison in a fit of despair."

"Maybe," shrugged the doctor. "But what I'd like to know is why he took all his clothes off before doing it. What on earth did he have in his mind when he did that?"

The warden grunted and looked at the flaccid body on the lower bunk. In death as in life, Littell was the opposite of attractive.

"Stir-simple, I guess. Anyway, who cares?"

The Whistling Corpse

By G. G. PENDARVES

A gripping weird tale of the sea—of the thing that walked in the fog—and the terror that stalked on board an ocean liner.

"WHY, Steevens, whatever is the matter? You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"And if I haven't, it's by the mercy of Providence," replied the chief steward, "though what we *may* see before this trip is over is something I don't want to think about."

Mrs. Maddox stared. She'd been stewardess on board the *S. S. Dragon* for the past five years, worked under Steevens all that time, and knew him for the most even-tempered, easy-going creature that ever sailed in a ship. She felt a nasty sensation of goose-flesh and clutched her bundle of clean white towels a trifle more tightly in her arms.

"Good gracious me! Well, what is it? You're getting me all in a dither!"

"They've — they've opened Number 14!"

She frowned, blinked, and several towels slid unnoticed to the floor.

"Not *the* 14? Not 14 on deck A? No!"

Her voice rose discordantly, and Steevens was recalled to his duty by its sudden stridency.

"S-s-s-sh! D'you want the passengers to hear? They're going down to dinner. Second bugle's sounded."

They were standing in one of the linen-rooms, a narrow slip near a main companionway. Mrs. Maddox turned a white, stricken face.

"Tell me, quick!"

"Captain's orders! This is his first command. He's young, thinks he knows everything. Isn't going to keep a first-class stateroom locked up on *his* ship. I heard the end of a row him and the chief was having. Mr. Owen up and told him as the owners knew all about it. And the Old Man said he was going to show the owners there wasn't no need to lose money every trip."

"Steevens!" Mrs. Maddox looked suddenly far older than her forty-eight years. "If I hear that whistling again I'll—I'll lose my reason and that's a fact."

He had no comfort to offer. The man's cheerful, weathered face wore the same look of dread as her own.

"You can't tell the cap'n anything. But wait till he hears it too!"

"And when he does"—she turned on him with a fury of demoralizing fear—"what good's that going to do us all? It'll be too late then. The door's opened now and it's out again . . . it's *out!*"

FIRST-CLASS passengers were making their way to the dining-saloon for the first meal on board. The *S. S. Dragon* had left Liverpool landing-stage only two hours ago; so people straggled in without ceremony, tired from the bustle of embarkation, agitated about the preliminaries of settling down on board; the majority either wound up to a pitch that sought relief in floods of talk or preserved stony silence that would have done credit to tombstone effigies.

Mark Herron, a boy of ten, traveling in the captain's care, stood in hesitation at the entrance to the dining-saloon. One

of the passengers, a Mr. Amyas, put a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"Coming in?"

Without hesitation now, Mark smiled up at the brown, wrinkled face with its piercingly black eyes.

"Waiting for someone, eh?"

"No." The boy's voice was as attractive as his slate-gray eyes that concentrated so eagerly on anything or anyone that attracted his attention. His rough shock of brown hair and equally rough brown tweeds made him look somewhat like a very intelligent, well-bred dog.

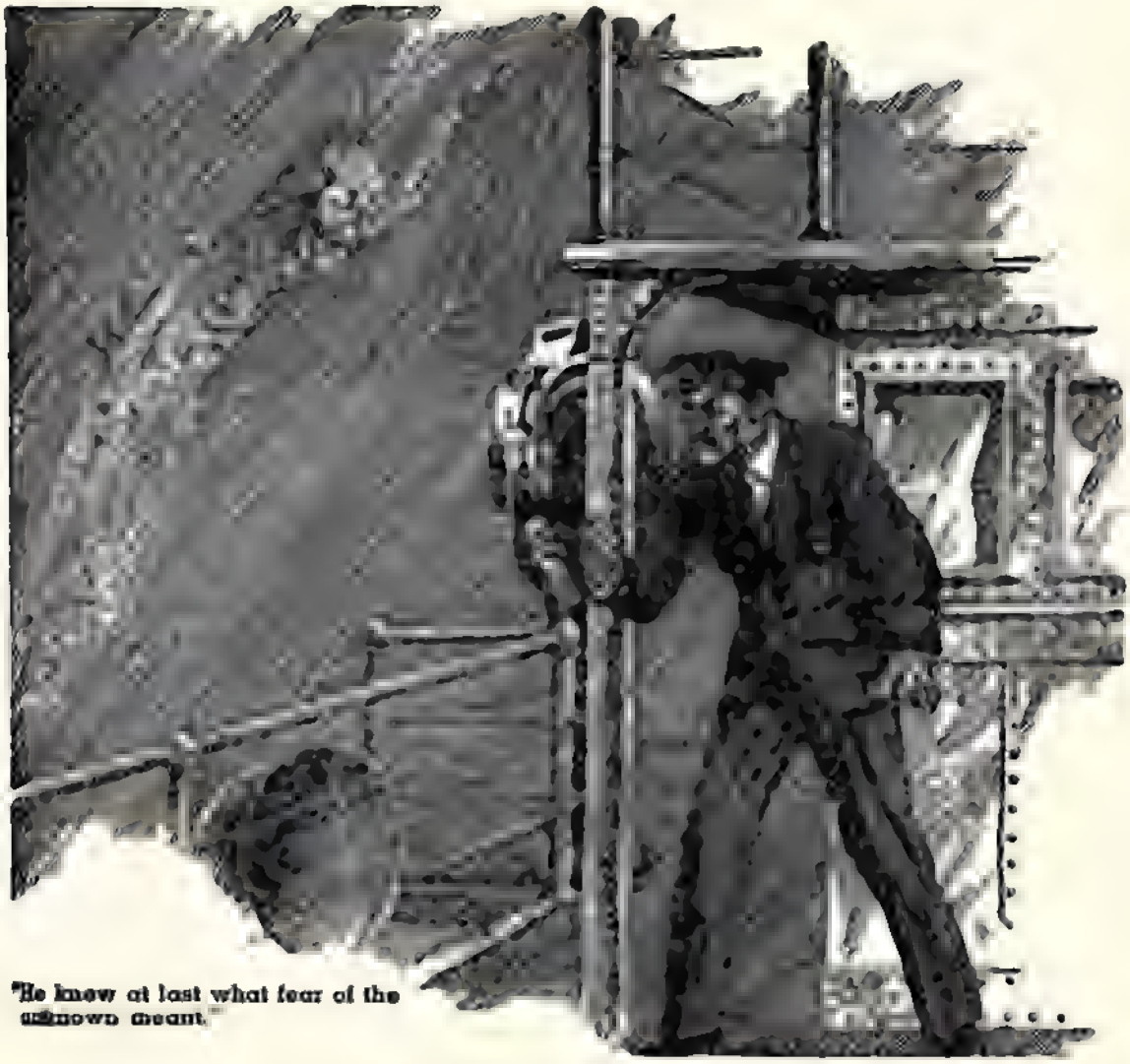
"I'm traveling alone," he confided. "I've been ill and Captain Ross knows Dad and told him I'd be better for a sea-trip. I'm going to Java and back on this ship."

The gipsy-black eyes twinkled. "That's my program too! We'll keep each other company—eh? My name's Amyas. And you're——?"

"Mark Herron, sir."

"All right, then. Now, let's plunge into the jungle and see what we can catch for a meal."

The little man made for a table over on the port-side, one of the smaller tables where some member of the staff had al-



"He knew at last what fear of the unknown meant."

ready begun his meal. As Mark and his new friend approached, the man looked up. Immediately he sprang to his feet, welcoming hand outstretched.

"How are you, Amyas? I'm delighted! Who's this you've got in tow? A stowaway?"

Mark was introduced to the ship's doctor. Mr. Amyas sat down. The boy stood, looking with bewildered frown at the third and only vacant place.

Doctor Fielding laughed. "What's the matter? Something wrong with that chair?"

The boy's face grew red. He looked from the doctor to Mr. Amyas with embarrassed reproach. "Oh—but——" He glanced apologetically at the third place, then moved hastily to a table near by and sat down there.

The two men stared at Mark. Covered with confusion, he was pretending to study a large menu-card.

"Must think we want to be by ourselves."

Mr. Amyas got up and crossed over to the boy's table. "Come and join us. What d'you mean by refusing to sit down with a friend of mine—eh?"

Mark glanced back at the other table. His face cleared. He went back with alacrity and slipped into the empty place.

"I think he was angry," he looked from one to the other of his companions' blank faces. "He's gone out without any dinner at all."

Then, as they continued to regard him with expressionless eyes, he laughed.

"Is it a joke, or something? That man didn't think it funny, anyhow, when you wanted me to sit down on top of him."

"What was he like?" The doctor's voice held a sudden arrested note of breathless interest.

"Didn't you notice him?" Mark marveled. "Such a queer man, too! A yellow sort of face, very lined and cross, and he'd black hair—like the Italian organ-grinder who comes round with his monkey at home."

"Did you—did you happen to notice if he wore a ring?" The doctor seemed quite amazingly interested.

"Yes. A very big one, rather dull and funny-looking! I thought he must be a foreign prince. Like the ones in the papers, you know. Going off somewhere because they'd taken his throne away. That's what he looked like."

Doctor Fielding put his arms on the table, leaned forward, regarded the boy with a strange look of awe.

"Look here! You're the kid the captain's looking after—the great Arthur Herron's son?"

Mark nodded, his face glowing at the admission.

"H-m-m! Captain Ross said you were a bit of a wizard yourself with your pencil. You can draw?"

Mark nodded again with calm confidence.

"Could you, by any chance, draw from memory the man you saw sitting here?"

The boy smiled and pushed aside his soup-plate. He turned the menu-card face down, dug a pencil out of a pocket and set to work. Both men watched intently, Mr. Amyas interested in the peculiar mixture of child and artist, the doctor wholly absorbed in the portrait growing under the small, amazingly sure hand. The table steward removed three plates of cold soup and put three portions of fish down with bored resignation. He hovered with a dish of potatoes, caught a glare from the doctor and went to bestow his vegetables elsewhere.

Mark handed his sketch to Doctor Fielding, who regarded it long and frown-

ingly. Finally he got to his feet. His face was grave.

"Sorry! You'll have to excuse me. I've —remembered something urgent."

He went out of the saloon with an air of absent-minded haste and took Mark's sketch with him.

"Oh! Was it a prince, d'you think? Is he going to look for him?"

Mr. Amyas discussed the possibility, then led the conversation to other things. The two hit it off famously and went together, afterward, in uproarious spirits to the billiard room.

THE coolness in Captain Ross's eyes bordered on contempt as he looked up from Mark's sketch. Doctor Fielding's lean, clever face and tired eyes showed a deeper weariness as he met that look. Captain Ross was one who admitted no breath from the chill void of eternity to penetrate his materialism. It was a solid wall about his thoughts.

The doctor's own mind, ever exploring, seeking, experimenting, found no smallest chink whereby to enter, yet he must attempt it. If he failed, if Captain Ross remained unconvinced, then the *S. S. Dragon* would become a floating hell.

"If the boy saw this man," Captain Ross tapped the menu-card with impatient gesture, "then the man must have been sitting there."

"I did not see him, sir. Mr. Amyas did not see him. The steward did not see him."

"But the boy did! He's not a liar—I happen to know that. If he told you he saw the man, he *did* see him."

"And I repeat — this man," Doctor Fielding indicated the drawing, "died on this ship a year ago and his body was committed to the deep. I saw it done."

"All right, then. In that case there is a passenger on board who bears an extraordinary resemblance to him. That doesn't pass the bounds of possibility. Your idea of a *révenant* does."

A knock at the door interrupted them. The first mate, Mr. Owen, entered. Steevens and Mrs. Maddox followed.

"Ah!" the commander's frosty blue eyes regarded them quizzically. "You three, I understand, were on this ship a year ago when Number 14 on deck A was sealed up?"

"Yes, sir," replied the first mate.

The other two made muffled sounds of assent and endeavored to exchange glances while presenting blank, respectful faces to Captain Ross.

"D'you recognize this, Mr. Owen?"

The chief bent over the table to examine Mark's sketch, then straightened himself with a jerk. His ruddy face was suddenly a sickly brown. He averted his eyes from the sketch as from something that shocked him profoundly. His voice came with a queer uncontrolled jerk.

"Yes, sir! It's—it's *him!*"

"I must ask you to be more explicit. Him?"

"Vernon—Eldred Vernon! Where . . . how——?"

He stopped, and thrust shaking hands deep into his pockets. Captain Ross turned his scornful, impatient glance toward the steward and stewardess.

"Come on! Come on! Let's get this farce over!"

Timidly the pair advanced and peered reluctantly at the card thrust before their eyes.

"Well? Speak, can't you! Is this your old friend, Vernon?"

"God save us—yes!" muttered Steevens. He fell back from the pictured face in horror.

Mrs. Maddox gave a terrified squawk and clutched him by the arm.

"A-r-r-r! A-r-r-r! It's him again! Take it away! I won't look at it! A-r-r-r——"

"Be quiet," barked the captain. "Take her over to that chair, Steevens. You two have got to stop here while this affair is settled once and for all."

He looked from one tense face to another and his eyes sparkled with temper.

"You all agree, it seems, that this boy's drawing resembles—who's the man?"

"Eldred Vernon, sir—the late Eldred Vernon," replied the doctor.

"Eldred Vernon, yes. The man who was murdered on this ship in May of 1935."

"The man who murdered Mr. Lackland, sir," softly corrected the first mate.

"Murderer, or murdered, it's all one now. The point is, he's dead."

A deep, unassenting silence answered the statement. Four pairs of eyes expressed complete unbelief in it.

"A pretty lot of fools I seem to have on board! What *is* this mystery? Doctor Fielding, will you have the goodness to make a clear, sensible statement of the facts? The facts, I said, mind you. I don't want a fairy-tale packed with superstition and ghosts."

"Did you read the log for May of 1935?" asked the doctor. "And did the owners explain their reasons for leaving Number 14 sealed up?"

"Yes, to both questions. But don't forget that my predecessor, Captain Brakell, was a very sick man when he entered up that log. The owners had the facts from him—a sick man's delusions! I attach no value to them. I said as much in the office at Liverpool, gave my opinions. They understood that I proposed to run my own ship in my own way. I will allow no tomfool nonsense to interfere with it."

The doctor's face showed a stain of painful color.

"You are very much mistaken, sir, in thinking that Captain Brakell was ill when he entered up the log. He was a very sound man, sound and sane and healthy. His mind then, and to the end of his days, was particularly clear. He was a man of enviable courage and strength and determination. Otherwise he could never have done what he did."

There was a stir and murmur of assent in the small, brightly lit room.

"Captain Brakell collapsed only on reaching port. He brought his ship home first. He brought her home with that devil, Eldred Vernon, imprisoned in Number 14."

"You mean Vernon didn't die during the voyage, after all? You have already told me you saw his body committed to the deep."

"I repeat that I did. But Eldred Vernon's devil lived on—an audible and visible thing."

"And I repeat that I don't believe a syllable."

Again color painted the doctor's sallow face an angry red.

"Words mean nothing," he answered curtly. "Words mean nothing. Captain gave his life to make his ship safe. He was heroic, I tell you. Faced terrific odds, and won by sheer strength and goodness. He cornered that crafty devil, Vernon. He couldn't destroy him—that was beyond even *his* wisdom, but he managed to imprison him, to make his ship safe. And you——"

He broke off, remembering he and the captain were not alone. There was an awkward pause. Captain Ross sat with broad, well-kept hands folded on

the table before him. Aggressive unbelief depressed the corners of his long, firm mouth. His upper lids drooped quizzically over cold inquiring eyes. Doctor Fielding sighed, paused as if to marshal inner reserves of strength, then began again on a new flat note of narrative devoid of emotion.

"The whole thing started with an affair between Guy Lackland and Eldred Vernon's very young, very lovely wife, Kathleen Vernon. It blazed up tropically swift and hot. Lackland was attractive, very! Nordic type. In love with life, with himself, and above all with Kathleen Vernon. Brilliant, rollicking youngster. Irresponsible as a puppy off the lead. And whistled like a blackbird."

A stifled groan escaped the stewardess.

"It was a characteristic that features largely in my tale, sir, Lackland's whistling. Dancing, swimming, deck-games, strolling round—you could always keep track of him by that trick he had of whistling. But there was one tune he whistled for one person alone—a sort of lover's signal. The tune was *Kathleen Mavourneen.*"

Mrs. Maddox engulfed herself in a large, crumpled pocket-handkerchief. Steevens rubbed a bristly chin. The first mate shifted his feet as if the deck had rolled beneath him, and his throat muscles worked convulsively.

"Her name was Kathleen, as I said. She was a dark, fragile, exquisite thing. Lonely and unhappy. Afraid of her husband. Ripe for a lover. And she fell for young Lackland hard. Inevitably. I never witnessed anything more heart-breaking than her passion for him. Like seeing a brilliant-tinted leaf riding the peak of a monstrous tidal-wave. Swept past all barriers. The pair of them—lost to everything but youth and love—the glory of it! Tragic young fools!"

Captain Ross made no audible comment. His set, obstinate face spoke fathomless misunderstanding.

"Eldred Vernon was a good fifty. A lean, secretive, silent man. Intellectual—repellently so. His brain-power was abnormal. His reasoning faculties, will, concentration were terrific. He'd developed them at the expense of every other quality that makes a decent, likable human being. There was dark blood in him, too. His swaying walk, a peculiar way of rolling his eyes, the lines of jaw and skull. Unmistakably negroid. The boy shows it in his sketch here."

Captain Ross glared at it and grunted noncommittally.

"The ugliest thing of all was his jealousy. It's a poisonous quality in anyone. In Vernon it was satanic. He never interfered, though. On the contrary, he arranged to throw them together quite deliberately. We didn't begin to fathom his motives, but the whole situation made our blood run cold. There was none of the ordinary scandal. The affair was too serious, everyone felt scared. I spoke to young Lackland; so did others. One or two of the women warned the wife. Both of them laughed. Eldred Vernon laughed too. It sidetracked the pair of them, the way he laughed! She vowed her husband didn't care two straws what she did as long as she left him alone. Incredible! Everyone was afraid of what Vernon would do except the two most concerned."

Doctor Fielding dropped his cigarette, which had burned down unsmoked between his fingers.

"The inevitable crisis came. She gave Vernon a sleeping-draft in his last whisky one night, then went along to Lackland's stateroom, Number 14 on A deck. Waited for a moment. Heard him inside, moving about, whistling—whistling *Kathleen Mavourneen.*"

"And how," interrupted Captain Ross, "do you come by this chapter of your melodrama?"

"She told me—later."

"You had the lady's confidence, I see! Perhaps after Lackland went you took his——"

"She was dying."

The doctor's voice and steady eyes did not waver. He went on like an automaton.

"SHE went into Number 14 to find—her husband! He was laughing, silently, doubled up, tears of mirth on his face. He tied her up and gagged her, laughing all the time. Told her Lackland would be late. He'd forged a note in her writing, sent it to Lackland asking him to wait, to come to Number 14 at midnight, not earlier on any account. Vernon had counted on a lover's obedience to any whim. He was right.

"Lackland came on the stroke of twelve. Vernon was ready for him—with a knife. In the struggle, Lackland got a grip of the other's throat. Vernon thrust home. In his death-agony, Lackland's hands tightened, fastened like a vise. Vernon was asphyxiated. A steward found them both dead, lying locked together at Mrs. Vernon's feet."

The bleak austerity in Doctor Fielding's eyes checked comment.

"That's all of what you would call fact. Mrs. Vernon died—brain-fever in the end."

"And they were all buried at sea? All three of them?"

Captain Ross looked not wholly unsympathetic.

"Yes."

"Then I know the whole thing from start to finish at last."

"No. It is not finished yet, sir. Vernon knew the secret of perpetuating himself in the physical world even without his body. That had been lowered over the side and I saw it done. But Vernon himself—his malicious powerful ego—has never left this ship."

The captain's softened expression was instantly combative. "I've listened to your story, to the end—to the very end! Thank you, doctor. I've no time to speculate on ghosts. Once and for all, I don't believe in the supernatural."

He turned to the others.

"Before we break up this meeting, have you anything to say? Mr. Owen?"

The first mate was a Welshman, vivacious, sensitive, emotional.

"The doctor's not told you half, sir," he burst out. "You don't know what a hell the ship was for days and nights. God, those nights! Up and down the deck—up and down, whistling—if you could call it whistling."

"Whistling what? And what whistled?"

Mr. Owen was past being daunted by the captain's glance.

"A high, queer sort of sound, sir. No tune or anything. Went through your head like red-hot wire. What was it? Don't ask me, sir! It doesn't bear thinking of."

"Exactly. That's my complaint against you all. You refuse to think. This absurd legend of Number 14 would never have existed if you'd thought, and investigated. Anything more?"

"I—we—there was the fog, sir! And Steevens here saw——"

"I'll take him in turn. Fog?"

"Yes, sir. Fog or sea-mist. The whistling seemed to come from it."

With a quick, irritable gesture, Captain Ross turned to the steward.

"Well? What's your little contribution?"

"It's true, sir. You'll know for yourself soon. The whistling and all! Something cruel! Drove you wild, sir! Aye, and that Number 14! Locking the door wasn't no use; no, nor bolting it neither. Chips did his mortal best. But every morning it was burst open, and the bunk —covered thick with dirty foam! The smell of it fair knocked you down, sir. Like something that had rotted in the sea."

Mrs. Maddox was obviously beyond giving verbal support to these statements. She sat shivering, white-faced, tears dripping down her large, pale face to the starched bib on her apron.

Captain Ross got to his feet.

"Thank you, Doctor Fielding. Thank you, Mr. Owen. Steward! Report any complaints about Number 14 on deck A to me, if you please. The passenger who is to occupy it is Colonel Everett, a personal friend. He is aware of the facts. I've told him of the deaths that occurred. The rest interests him even less than me."

"One moment." The doctor followed him to the door. "I shall tell your friend, Colonel Everett, the exact nature of the risk he is running."

"Do! He will laugh at you. He shares my views of what you call supernatural phenomena."

"You are exposing him to hideous peril. It's murder, sir!"

Captain Ross looked bored and put his hand to the door-latch.

"One more thing." The doctor's manner was that of a lecturer making his points. "Eldred Vernon marks down his victims methodically, and in every case he gives twenty-four hours warning, a signal of his intent to kill. He whistles *Kathleen Mavourneen.* Last May, before Captain Brakell was able to seal up the door you have opened, five passengers heard that tune. Each one died in twenty-four hours."

"Logged as dying of virulent influenza. I gather the owners suggested your substituting influenza as your diagnosis in place of ghosts?"

"It was heart-failure from shock."

"Quite. Well, Captain Brakell and I had the same end in view. But we went about it differently. He calmed down his passengers by going through a ceremony of sealing up Vernon's supposed influence. I see more wisdom in letting sun and wind and everyday life penetrate Number 14. After this trip it will be a chamber of horror no longer. I'll have no locked-up rooms on my ship. And anyone who goes round encouraging a belief in ghosts will lose his job and needn't apply to me for references."

"GOOD morning! Good morning!" A brick-red, large gentleman at the captain's table, engaged in adding a top-dressing of toast and marmalade to previous strata of porridge, fish, and sausages, spared an inquiring glance for a limp young man who slid into a seat next him. The young man had butter-colored hair and looked as if serious consideration of vitamins had been omitted from his education.

"Why 'good'? he moaned. "I've been kept awake all night."

The brick-red gentleman was surprized. "Eh? What? I slept like old Rip Van Winkle."

The limp young man unfurled a table-napkin with the air of one who drapes a winding-sheet about him.

"China tea. This brown toast and bloater paste." He lifted an eyelid to a hovering steward. Then, to his neighbor:

"Perhaps you're married or live by

a fire-station. I mean," he explained, "whistlings and shriekings and stampings just lull you to sleep! You on deck A? No! I'm in Number 18. There's a damned nuisance of a colonel in 14. Kept up an infernal racket last night."

"Pipe down, my lad, pipe down! He's a friend of the captain!"

"Well, he's going to have an 'in loving memory' label on him soon! Never had such a night."

A tall, straight ramrod of a man stalked in, made his way to the table and took the vacant place at the captain's right.

"I say!" bleated the butter-haired one. "What's the great idea of practising your tin whistle all night? You may think Number 14's sound-proof. Is it? All you've got to do is to come outside and listen to yourself!"

Colonel Everett drank down a cup of coffee almost at a gulp, murmured something about the shortage of reliable nurses, and gave an order to the steward. A good many faces were turned toward him. Other accusers gave vent to their rancor.

"If you're the occupant of Number 14, sir, I think it was damned thoughtless—damned thoughtless of you!" And:

"I'm not one of the complaining ones, but the noise you made was unbearable. My husband got up five times and knocked at your door. And you simply took no notice!" And:

"Are *you* the person in Number 14? I was just telling the captain that it's disgraceful. After all, one does expect some decency and quiet in first-class. My two children were awake and crying all night. No wonder! Such an uproar! Why, even steerage couldn't be more rowdy."

"What *is* all this about the noise in your stateroom?" asked Captain Ross.

"Someone's idea of a joke." Colonel Everett's face and manner were grim.

The captain frowned at him and spoke under his breath.

"Were you pickled when you went to bed, Tom?"

"Don't be a fool! You've known me all my life. I never take more than four whiskies a day."

"Then why didn't you hear all the din?"

"Dunno! Unless I'm due for malaria again. I felt deuced queer when I woke. Dizzy. Couldn't get the hang of things. Feel half doped now."

"Hm-m-m-m! Perhaps you are—doped! This fool notion about Number 14 being haunted! Some maniac's trying it out on us. I'll put him in irons, whoever it is. I've given fair warning I'll have no more of their pet spook on my ship."

Colonel Everett thrust his face forward. His eyes glared. His lips stretched in an ugly grin. His clear emphatic voice changed to a thin dry rustling whisper.

"What are you going to do about it?"

Captain Ross's fork dropped with a clatter. He met the evil, malevolent stare hardily, but his face grew white to the lips. Quite literally, he was unable to speak. His thick black brows met. Was this Tom Everett? He didn't recognize the man he'd known so long and intimately. Those cold eyes—hating, defying him! This was a stranger! An enemy!

A voice broke the spell—a boy's voice, eager, confident, friendly.

"How queer! I thought that was Colonel Everett at first. He seemed to change. It's the man I drew last night. The prince in disguise, you know."

Colonel Everett drew back, looked round him with a frown. His face and eyes were blank now. He seemed rather

shaken, like a man who'd been just knocked down and winded.

Captain Ross felt a sudden vast relief. What an ass he was! Good heavens; he'd actually felt afraid, afraid of good old Tom Everett! The poor fellow was looking ill and shaken. Distinctly under the weather. He signaled to Doctor Fielding, who came round to the head of the table and put a hand on the colonel's shoulder.

"Come along with me; I'll fix you up. You've had a rotten night, I can see."

Dazed, swaying on his feet, Colonel Everett allowed the doctor to guide him out of the saloon.

IN THE big, perfectly equipped kitchens the breakfast episode was discussed with terror.

"I tell you he looked as like *him* for a minute as makes no difference." The steward who waited on the captain's table was telling his tale for the eighth time for the benefit of those detained on duty. "One minute he was the colonel and next minute he was *him!* The Old Man noticed it and all! Looked as if he'd been and swallowed a h'asp."

A brand new young steward spoke up. "Who's this *him* when he's at home?"

"Someone you've not met so far, my cocky. And when you do, you won't crow so loud."

Mrs. Maddox, trying to drown her fear in floods of dark brown tea, intervened.

"And how's he going to know if no one don't tell him? Nay! I'm not going to take *his* name on my lips. Someone else can do it—that hasn't heard nor seen what I have on this ship."

Mr. Amyas and the doctor talked in a corner of the deserted dining-saloon.

"He went along to the smoking-room. Revived as soon as we got outside, and refused to go back to bed."

"Hm-m-m!" The little man pulled at his short, pointed white beard. "Could you hear what he was saying to the captain at the breakfast table?"

"No. I saw enough, though. What the boy said was right. He *was* Vernon for a moment."

"Undoubtedly, Colonel Everett *as* Colonel Everett will soon cease to exist."

The doctor shivered, turned a stricken face seaward. Remembrance of last year's horror surged back with every movement of the restless, sunlit water.

"Eldred Vernon's taking possession of the colonel's body as one would a house. He's moving in," continued Mr. Amyas. "It's barely possible that if the real owner knew what was happening to him he might defend his habitation, drive out the intruder, but I doubt it. Evidence proves Vernon to have unique power. History has only produced two others on his scale. There is the Black Monk of Caldey Island, who has guarded his treasure there since the Tenth Century. And there is Lord Saul, a terror and a mystery since the days of Attila, who tried to kill him by fire and by the sword, and failed. Lord Saul lives to this day."

"Vernon was bound and safely imprisoned once. Can't we do it again?"

"You forget. A year ago Vernon was newly divorced from his body. He was taken at his weakest, before he'd learned the laws, the possibilities of life in a new element. In twelve months he's learned them, so effectively that he's almost achieved his great necessity—a human body."

"Surely that will limit him? A disembodied force is more awful than the wickedest of men."

"No. He'll gain the freedom of two worlds. He can operate in *or* out of his stolen body. And he can use the will and energy of the dispossessed owner for his

own ends. It's a tremendous prize. He'll rank high in hell."

"But—how d'you know all this? You speak as if——"

"It's a long, grim, unnerving tale. Made an old man of me when I was in my twenties, experimenting, like the mad young fool I was then, in occult research. Some day, if we survive, I'll tell it."

"Isn't there the barest chance of saving Everett? Can't you make him believe?"

"That's what I don't know. I can only guess. It's one of the things that doesn't go by rule of thumb. Every crisis varies. But there *is* a moment——"

They were interrupted by a scream, sounds of running feet, a second scream. Mr. Amyas turned, ran lightly along to deck A with the doctor at his heels. An excited group of passengers was collecting there. The first mate appeared. Inside the open doorway of a lounge stood Steevens with several other cabin stewards. They appeared to be holding an agitated council of war.

The first mate addressed this twittering little group. "What's all this?"

"Sir! It's Number 14. We saw——"

"Get inside. I'll come along."

He returned to the startled passengers. "Nothing much." His smile was reassuring. "One of the stewardesses! She's had hysterics again. Husband died a few weeks ago and she's gone to pieces over it."

"Very neat," commended Doctor Fielding. "We'll come with you to see what's really happened."

Owen nodded. His eyes and mouth looked strained. Outside the closed door of Number 14 a huddle of white-coated stewards waited.

"It's what it was before, sir," whispered Steevens. "The bunk was covered with it. Foam—dirty gray foam—inches thick! Right over the bunk, pillows and all. And the smell—my Gawd!"

Owen stood rigid, one hand on the door-latch. Mr. Amyas saw him shudder, caught the loathing on his face as he flung open the door and went inside. Doctor Fielding and Mr. Amyas followed quickly. All three looked instantly at the bunk. A pall of dirty gray foam covered it, like the silt of a monster tidal wave; the air was foul with the odor of stale sea-water and things long dead. Doctor Fielding scribbled a few words in his note-book, tore out the leaf and gave it to the first mate.

"Take that to the captain—at once!"

Thankfully the man escaped. A steward called after him.

"If he wants this bunk made up he'll have to get another man for the job. I'd sooner jump overboard. I'm not going inside 14 again! He can put me in irons—but I won't—I won't——"

The first mate vanished beyond reach of the man's hysterical outburst. No one paid any attention to it. All eyes were fixed on Doctor Fielding and Mr. Amyas standing inside.

"Quick!" cried the doctor. "Out of here!"

Next moment, both were in the passage, and the door fast bolted, but not before they'd seen the blanket of gray foam ripple and heave as if water surged beneath it. And as the door banged to, a sudden shrill whistling began—like the sound of escaping steam. Footsteps approached, a firm, soldierly tread. Colonel Everett's tall straight figure advanced down the long corridor. The whistling ceased abruptly.

"What on earth? Are you playing 'Clumps'? And why outside my door?"

The colonel's eyes, friendly and puzzled, turned from the doctor's haggard

face to meet the speculative watchful gaze of Mr. Amyas. He put a hand to his head.

"Better follow your advice after all, Doctor Fielding. I'm beginning to feel——"

Then, with appalling suddenness, he changed. Voice, face, manner took on the feral primitive hate of a jungle beast. He loomed over Mr. Amyas.

"You're one of the clever ones, you think—spying round, adding up, working out your little ideas! *That's* puzzled you, I'll swear!" He jerked his head toward the closed door; a wicked flare of laughter leaped in his eyes. "Go on worrying —I'm enjoying it! You'll not get me caged up there again, though. *I'm out! . . . and I stay out!*"

Todd, the hysterical young steward, gave an odd, sighing cough and slid to the ground. Steevens dropped beside him, unfastened his collar, held up his head. The rest ran for it, bolted in panic, their feet thudding along the narrow passage like a roll of drums.

Under Mr. Amyas's steady look the red glare died in Colonel Everett's eyes, his convulsed features relaxed. He steadied himself by a polished brass handrail that ran along the wall.

"I thought—I thought someone called me," he said. "I feel a little dizzy!" He looked vaguely from Mr. Amyas to the unconscious Todd, then to Steevens. "What's been happening here? What the deuce is wrong with everyone on this ship?"

"Colonel Everett!" Mr. Amyas was profoundly serious. "Will you put prejudice aside? Will you be persuaded that you are in danger? Will you believe that this room is more poisonous than a rattlesnake's lair?" He gestured to the closed door behind them. "Have you been in since breakfast? No! Well, it's taking a risk, but it may convince you."

He opened the door.

"Well?" the colonel frowned. "What is it?"

But Mr. Amyas found no answer. There was nothing to say. There was nothing to see except the bunk with its tossed bed-clothes—the flowered green curtains fluttering at the open window—the white enameled walls splashed by the sun with golden light. Mr. Amyas closed the door. The three men faced one another in the corridor.

"*Is* there any explanation for all this?"

The colonel, very large and indignant, stood with a frown. He was answered by a shrill, fierce whistle. It seemed outside the room now. Todd, who had recovered consciousness, glanced up, and fell back in a dead faint once more. Steevens cowered against the wall with mouth grotesquely open. He pointed at Colonel Everett.

"Look! Look! It's him! . . . ah, ha ha ha ha *ha! . . .* it's *him!*"

The doctor and Mr. Amyas shuddered.

"You'd better look out for yourselves," came a savage whisper. "You'd better not interfere. Nothing can stop me. *I'm out!*"

A twisted mask of a face leered into theirs.

"Look out for yourselves!"

On this last sneering menace, Colonel Everett's hand opened the door of Number 14. He went inside. The door slammed to. The whistling shrilled louder . . . higher . . . higher. . . .

"FOG, sir! Been drifting round for a couple of hours. I noticed it as soon as my watch began."

Captain Ross glanced down from his bridge toward the poop. There—among coils of tarry rope and a mass of can-

vas, iron, life-buoys, and other carefully stowed gear—a patch of white, woolly fog wavered and drifted. The captain snatched up a pair of binoculars and looked long and earnestly.

"Go down and see," he ordered.

The third mate saluted and went. His face was white as he turned to obey. Captain Ross watched while he made his way to deck B and thence to the poop, saw him go forward, hesitate, peer at the eddying fog. Suddenly he threw up his hands with a startled gesture and turned to run.

"Good God! It's after him!"

Captain Ross gripped the rail under his hands as he spoke, and leaned over to watch with eyes almost starting out of his head. Stumbling, running, turning to look back over his shoulder at the thing that steadily pursued, the mate zigzagged an erratic course. A woman's shriek was heard.

An instant later, pandemonium rose on deck B. Men and women struggled from their deck-chairs. Some, entangled in rugs, tripped and fell. Some were too paralyzed by horror to move at all. Deck stewards, serving tea-trays, let their burdens tilt, and the crash of breaking china added to the uproar.

The third mate ran with open mouth, his hands making queer flapping movements, his eyes wild with terror. The fog rolled up behind—closer—closer. A long white wisp of it seemed to blow out like a tentacle, touched the mate's neck, curled round it. The man yelled, put up clutching fingers. His cry died on a strangling sob.

Captain Ross roared out an order through his megaphone. The mate was down on his knees now. Over him the fog circled and hovered. Several of the crew came running; they were, so far, more in awe of the captain than anything else on board. They picked up the mate and carried him off at a run, vanished down a companionway.

Captain Ross let out a great breath of relief and put down his megaphone with an unsteady hand. The cloud of fog was blowing down deck again. Now it was drifting round the poop. And from it the captain heard a high, keening, intolerable whistle, rising, falling, rising again to torturing shrillness.

For minutes he stood watching, listening. At last he set a double watch on the bridge and went below. He knew at last what fear of the unknown meant. He knew at last that his ignorance and obstinacy had put his ship at the mercy of something he could not understand or control.

"Murder!" The word hammered and clanged through his brain. "Murder! That was the doctor's word. Said I was sending Tom to his death!"

Passengers huddled in groups, whispering, crying, cursing, utterly demoralized as he made his way through the luxurious lounge toward the deck A cabins. He knew it would be wise to stop, to reassure them, to check the panic that was running like wildfire in their midst. He knew also that he couldn't do it. His brain was numb with shock. He couldn't console these terrified people. He was terrified himself, sick and cold and stupid with terror.

He groaned as he hurried to Number 14. The door of the room stood wide open. Sunset light painted it blood-red. Its silence was horrible. A taunt—a threat—a prelude to disaster! He saw Mr. Amyas look in.

"Where is he? Where is Tom Everett?"

Mr. Amyas did not at first reply. He looked intently at the captain's altered face; then:

"You know—at last?"

"Yes, yes! I've seen—the Thing . . . the damned whistling Thing!"

Mr. Amyas nodded. "I was there. I ran down to look for the colonel while you were watching the mate. The cabin was empty then. I'm afraid we're too late. He's gone."

"Gone!" The word burst from the captain's white lips. He seized his companion's arm. His eyes were tortured. "Overboard?"

"No! No! It's worse than that. Eldred Vernon has become a permanent tenant now."

Captain Ross frowned in a fierce effort to follow the incomprehensible statement.

"I mean that Vernon has taken possession of your friend—body *and soul!* Colonel Everett appears to be in the smoking-room at this moment. In reality he's no more there than you or I. Vernon possesses him. Vernon is walking and talking in the body of Colonel Everett."

"But Tom—Tom, himself! Where is he, then?"

"A slave in bondage. In bondage so long as his body is possessed by Vernon. Suffering the torments of the damned. He is still able to think, to feel, to remember, but he is helpless. Vernon has overpowered him, taken his house from him. He's like a prisoner lying gagged and bound in some dark cellar of it."

"Go on, Mr. Amyas, go on!" The other's voice was harsh with grief. "What will happen to my passengers—my ship—to all of us, now?"

"I do not know. I can only guess. But I think not one of us will live to see land again. Your ship may be found—sometime—somewhere—a derelict, a mystery like the *Marie Celeste!*"

"There must be a way out. There must be a way."

"Only by destroying Eldred Vernon."

"How? How? D'you mean kill"—a look of awful enlightenment dawned in the captain's eyes—"you mean—I must kill—Tom Everett?"

"I don't know. I don't know." Mr. Amyas's brown face showed a network of lines and wrinkles. "I can only recall an affair I was once concerned in—an exorcism and a sacrifice—to drive out a devil."

"——to drive out a devil! Tell me what you know!"

And in the haunted silence of Number 14 Mr. Amyas told it.

"COLONEL EVERETT! Colonel Everett!" Mark called after the tall figure just stepping from the smoke-room to the deck outside. "You promised to tell me that tale about your tiger-hunt after tea."

The man paused on the threshold and half turned back to the boy. Mark, dashing across to him, drew up with a start about a yard away.

"I beg your pardon. I thought you were——" His serious slate-gray eyes flashed to the man's face, then to his dark green necktie, his collar, his gray tweeds—even his sports-shoes didn't escape the quick, keen scrutiny.

"I—have you borrowed the colonel's clothes?"

The boy's clear, surprized tone seemed to ring out like a bell in the room.

"Borrowed my own clothes! I *am* the colonel! What's the idea, Mark? Is this a riddle? Or, are you giving me an intelligence test?"

The boy stood absolutely still. Quite suddenly he drew back, a look of horror dawning on his pale, intelligent face.

"You're not the colonel. You've got black hair and your skin is yellow and you're older—much older. Where is Colonel Everett? I want him."

Men were looking at the pair now, peering over the tops of their papers; glancing up from writing-tables. Desultory bits of talk now ceased altogether. Everyone seemed suddenly aware of a crisis of peculiar significance between Mark and the man in gray tweeds.

The latter looked down with cold venom.

"Don't make a little fool of yourself!" His low voice reached Mark's ear alone. "If you ever say such a thing again to me I'll—*punish you.* No good running to your Mr. Amyas either; he won't be able to interfere much longer."

He went out quickly, leaving Mark staring, shivering, sick with fright. The glint of those cold eyes! The hate in that low-pitched voice!

"What's wrong, kid? What did he say?" A good-natured young fellow close by drew the boy over to a group in a corner. "Queer sort of man, that Colonel Everett! He's a bit annoyed with all of us today. Liver or something!"

Mark's white, drawn face did not relax. He shivered convulsively, tried to speak, failed. One of the group rose with an exclamation, glass in hand.

"Look here, old man." He put a hand on Mark's shoulder, held the glass to his lips with the other. "Take a sip of this and tell us what it's all about."

The boy drank, choked, dropped his head down on his knees—a huddled, frantic heap of misery.

"Better get the doctor. The little chap's ill."

The good-natured young fellow went to one of the doors, collided with two men about to enter. They were Mr. Amyas and Captain Ross.

"Ill? Mark?"

They listened to the young man's hasty, confused explanation and hurried to the boy. He looked exhausted and was leaning back with half-closed eyes, his features twitching, his delicate hands clenched tightly.

It took Mr. Amyas some minutes to get a word out of him. Captain Ross waited with a pinched gray look on his altered face.

"He was—awfully, *awfully* angry! As if he wanted to kill me!" Mark gasped. "It's that man! It's the prince! He said he was Colonel Everett—he's wearing his clothes—so I thought at first——"

Captain Ross exchanged a somber look with Mr. Amyas, who was supporting the boy.

"Oh! Oh! There he is whistling for me! And I don't like it—I don't like it!" Mark clapped his hands over his ears, dropped them again in bewildered fright. "It's in my head—the tune! Oh!—oh! I wish it would stop. It's—beastly!"

A strange silence fell on the rest. To no one but the boy was any whistling audible. The good-natured young man winked and touched his forehead significantly.

"Oh! Oh!" wailed the boy; "it's that funny old song—my nurse used to sing it to me. *Kathleen Mavourneen!* Oh, can't you make it stop?"

Mr. Amyas lifted him to his feet, put an arm about him. Above the boy's head he met the captain's eyes again.

"I'll get the doctor to give you something so that you won't hear it any more. Come along to my room. No need to be afraid of anything. You're quite right—that wasn't Colonel Everett. Come along. I'll explain. You'll be all right in a few minutes."

The last red rays of the setting sun flashed on the boy's face as he and his companion crossed the room and went out.

"What the deuce!" The good-natured young man stared at the doorway through

which the two had vanished. "Not the colonel! Is the boy a bit touched? He seemed such a bright lad, I thought."

Captain Ross glowered.

"Brighter than all the rest of us put together, it appears. That was *not* Colonel Everett."

"Good lord! What! You don't mean it! I'd have staked my last shirt——"

"Not Colonel Everett," repeated the captain in grim, heavy accents. "I don't think it's any use to warn you, but keep clear of him—if you can!"

He stalked out.

"Raving!" a young man in flannels drawled. "There seems to be something that breeds lunatics on the *S. S. Dragon.* What *is* at the bottom of all this? Whistling and hysterics! Joke's wearing thin. I'm fed up."

A stout, quiet man, playing patience, voiced his opinion in the manner of one accustomed to authority.

"I advise you to take Captain Ross seriously—and literally."

The flanneled one attempted to register world-weary contempt, but his smooth young face betrayed him into sulky resentment.

MR. AMYAS returned. He stood for a moment with his back to the light in a doorway, his black eyes raking the room—very quiet, not a hair out of place, and yet he gave an impression of most desperate haste and disorder.

"Has anyone seen Doctor Fielding?"

A chorus of anxious voices answered. No one had seen the doctor lately. Was the boy bad? They'd go and search. The quiet, sleepy atmosphere became charged with electricity. Some dashed off to find Doctor Fielding. The remainder pressed for information.

"Heart," Mr. Amyas stated briefly. "He's collapsed. Seems to have had a bad shock. Ah, here's Fielding——"

"Yes. It's the boy. Quickly!"

The passengers saw a look of understanding flash between the two men as they hurried away.

"Mystery! Crime! Adventure!" the man in flannels sneered. "Victim guaranteed every two hours."

"You rather underestimate the time." The stout man was putting away his patience cards. "However, optimism is a privilege of youth."

"Oh, go to hell!" said the flanneled one. But he said it under his breath, and only the trembling flame of the lighted match in his unsteady fingers made response. He walked toward a doorway.

"Er—look out for fog."

The quiet man stowed away his pocket-pack. His tone was perfectly casual.

"Fog! What d'you mean—fog?"

"Ran into some just before tea, I heard. Perhaps I should say—it ran into us."

"I know there was a hullabaloo. The mate got hysterics! But you don't suppose I think——"

"No! No!" the quiet man seemed really shocked at the idea. "Of course not. I know you don't."

The young man violently disappeared. The quiet man sat back in the attitude of one who awaits news. Several of those who had rushed off to find the doctor now returned. They seemed worried.

"Fog?" inquired the quiet man.

"What the devil makes you harp on fog?" one of them inquired.

"I was on deck B before tea," was the reply. "I've seen that sort of—fog, before! In North Borneo. Lived out there twenty years. It's apt to—er, hang about. Like poison-gas. More deadly, though."

"Well, you're right, as it happens," a muscular man in a Fair-isle sweater conceded. "There's a rum patch of fog or

mist or something drifting around near the wireless room. I heard that everlasting whistle going strong and thought I'd do a spot of investigating. Almost ran into the fog. Could have sworn the whistling came from it."

No one questioned his impression. He went on with increasing embarrassment.

"Don't know what came over me. The thing looked—well, I funked! Legged it back here as fast as I knew how!"

"Very sensible," approved the quiet man. "My experience has been that it only—er, functions in the open air, for some reason."

In a cabin close by, Mr. Amyas and the doctor looked down at Mark's quiet, unconscious face.

"He'll do for a few hours. That stuff'll make him sleep. Only question is whether we oughtn't to let him go—now—easily! Seems damnable to bring him back to face that devil again. The boy *knows*. And he's heard the death-signal. Why let him wake? Why let him face tomorrow? What d'you say, Amyas?"

The other nodded. "I agree. He mustn't come back to that. How long will your stuff hold him? Four or five hours?"

"Easily. More likely seven or eight."

"Five will take us to midnight. We'll leave it until then. Captain Ross is sending out S. O. S's. Going to transfer to a home-bound ship, if possible. Best give him another injection at midnight if no ship answers us—in time."

No need to harass the doctor before it became necessary. Mr. Amyas, therefore, did not admit that he had no hope of their S. O. S. messages getting through. He'd seen what the young man in the Fair-isle sweater had seen. More! He had looked inside the wireless room. No operator was there. A cloud of fog hung over it. It was not humanly possible for any man to sit in the place with that shrieking menace in his ears. There was no chance of outside help. The fight must be lost or won on board within the next few hours.

He looked down at the helpless, doomed little figure, turned toward the door, stepped back for a brief farewell.

"I promised you a gift in memory of this trip together. You shall have it—before midnight, Mark."

A PALE, chill twilight lingered in the sky. Electric lights shone from reflectors on deck. The sea ran smooth, gray-green below the ship's steep sides. Mr. Amyas looked about him with quick, bright eyes. Passengers—those not demoralized by fear, those who hadn't seen and didn't believe in fogs and foam and fantasies—were below, dressing for dinner. Those who did believe were dressing too. It didn't get you anywhere to encourage thoughts of that sort. A good dinner—dancing—lights—music—they'd forget it soon!

Mr. Amyas caught sight of the third mate making for the captain's bridge. Lights were on all over the ship. He thought how brilliant the *S. S. Dragon* must look, foaming on through the dark water, gleaming, illumined, swift. What passing craft would guess she was a ship of the damned? That she was bearing hundreds of souls to hell? That on her long, white, level decks, behind her lighted port-holes, in luxurious cabins and beautifully decorated saloons, horror stalked, biding its time?

His eyes followed the third mate. He was staggering uncertainly. He climbed up to the bridge with painful effort. The strong lights flooded him, showed a ghastly, twisted face of fear. He spoke with Captain Ross. Bad news, evidently. The captain's gesture was eloquent. He dismissed the officer, turned away, and

stood frowning. Mr. Amyas went up to him.

"That devil's got us, all right." Captain Ross turned fiercely. "Five men driven from the wheel this last hour. That infernal whistling fog! And I find it's the same with the wireless. He's cutting us off completely. What's the use of waiting, Amyas? I tell you it's madness to let him corner us like this. Every hour my ship's more at his mercy. Tom Everett is dead—murdered—I murdered him! It's Vernon, not Everett, walking round now, mocking us, destroying us. I'm going to shoot him. D'you hear me? It's time to *do* something. My ship will be helpless soon — driving blind — lost! There's only my first mate left to steer now—until that cursed whistling Thing drives him off too!"

"Only till midnight!" the other spoke with strong entreaty. "Only a few hours more! I know your friend is still alive. It will indeed be murder if you shoot him now. At midnight, I swear to you, Everett will be himself again. For a few minutes he will be the man you've always known—and loved."

"How d'you know? It's only a guess in the dark. And even if we wait—even if Tom does come back, he may not tell me how to destroy Vernon! You're only guessing all along the line. Why should Tom know this secret that you don't—and I don't? No! I must shoot that devil while there's a chance. It's monstrous—it's madness to let him destroy us inch by inch."

Mr. Amyas looked at him and said no more. He'd been afraid of this. The strain was inhuman. It passed the line of what could be endured. He turned to leave the bridge. Queerly enough, his submission touched some secret spring that protest and entreaty could not reach.

"Come back! Come back! Help me, Amyas! I can't watch here alone."

In the huge, handsome main saloon, unobtrusively reserved in gray oak and clouded-green upholstery, groups of card-players worked in isolated quartets, tense, serious, absorbed. Mostly elderly and middle-aged. The younger set was dancing. To this sanctum, Colonel Everett entered, stood observant, bright cruel eyes raking the unconscious players.

He walked, his accustomed firm decisive tread, now curiously sinuous and smooth, to a table where the Marchmonts and the Hore-Smiths were engaged in a long-drawn interesting battle. Wealthy, autocratic, exclusive, they represented a high average of breeding and brains.

"I shouldn't risk that."

Colonel Everett stabbed a finger down on the card which Mrs. Hore-Smith had led.

"Dummy," he went on, "has only queen, seven and three of clubs—ace and ten of diamonds—nine, five and two of hearts—and knave, ten, five, four and two of spades."

Four amazed, resentful faces were raised to meet the colonel's hard glare. Mr. Marchmont picked up the cards he had put face-down on the table and reversed them.

"You're right. Very clever. I've seen it done before—in Siam. Perhaps you'd reserve your—er—tricks until later!"

Cold malice leaped in Colonel Everett's eyes.

"Reserve my—er—tricks until later!" he mocked. "Later! You gibbering, conventional puppets! There won't be any later for you. After midnight I rule here! Even now——"

Mrs. Marchmont, very handsome, very haughty, cut him short.

"If you must talk, go elsewhere. Otherwise——"

"You don't want to talk?"

"Nor to listen."

He nodded and made a quick, insolent gesture. His eyes showed a gleam of wicked white.

"Then don't talk. Play!"

The two couples, with strained, altered faces, resumed. In silence—in absolute silence they played. Colonel Everett sat back smoking, his long legs crossed, one foot wagging in perpetual motion. Not a single word escaped from any of the players. They sat stiffly. They moved hands and arms only. Their eyes sought his—read in his evil, mocking glance what cards to put down. Colonel Everett played out a whole rubber thus, merely using the Marchmonts and Hore-Smiths as physical mediums. And they knew what was happening to them. Their wills impotently battled his.

The rubber finished, Colonel Everett stood up and waved a hand that seemed boneless at the wrist.

"It is not everyone who would respect your wishes so perfectly, Mrs. Marchmont. Well, we've had enough bridge now."

His sinister, sidelong glance collected eyes all over the room. Inexplicably to themselves, the players looked up simultaneously.

"We'll go and watch the dancing for a time. This game begins to pall."

He sat down, lighted a fresh cigarette, waited. Group after group rose from the tables. Well-fed, expensively attired sheep ready for the slaughter. They threaded a decorous way to the entrances and passed out of sight.

Colonel Everett rose to watch them go. Lucifer, Son of the Morning! So had *he* towered in dark lust to rule!

On the dancing-floor, color flashed like gorgeous birds among a forest of black coats. Musicians combined in assaulting every primitive urge possessed by man. Ordinary lights were turned off. The dancers swayed through shafts of green and purple, blue, red and yellow.

At Colonel Everett's entrance the shifting floodlights died. Brilliant white lights sprang to life from every bulb in the place. The dancers laughed. A buzz of talk reverberated. Dick Redlands glanced up in annoyance. The most beautiful girl on board was sitting out with him. He adored her. He was letting Wanda know about it and she seemed not uninterested. What fool had turned on the electric lights?

Wanda's grave, wistful, profoundly gray eyes turned to the doorway where Colonel Everett's evening clothes seemed to invest him with quite regal dignity. He bowed to her across the dance-floor and advanced.

"Look here, Wanda! You're not going to dance with that bounder." Dick lost his head in sudden, plunging, nameless fear. "It's impossible! He's . . . he's——"

"What is he?"

Dick was unable to say. The girl's black head with its narrow wreath of pearls was turned from him. Her fingers lay unresponsive in his clasp. Her quickened breath fluttered the gauzy petals of a flower at her breast.

"Wanda!" he urged. "No! Don't dance with him. There's something wrong—he's a rotter—a——"

The colonel was bowing low before Wanda now, drawing her to her feet, melting into the dance with the girl's supple figure held close. Dick stared after them. He was afraid—damnably afraid—and he didn't know at all what it was he feared. But his eyes followed the girl. Her face was turned to her partner's shoulder; his lips were close to her ear, moving, moving in ceaseless talk.

". . . but it won't last. It can't last, your beauty! You are only a shell. A lovely, painted, fragile shell. After to-

night all your beauty will be gone. You'll be dead. Have you ever seen a body that's been in the water for a day or two? For a week? For a month? Very revolting indeed. Bloated — swollen — oh! most nauseating. And the fishes——"

On and on went the horrible whispering voice, painting its hellish pictures, destroying her body—her eyes—her hair—giving her loveliness to hideous death with sure, unrelenting strokes. And, gripped in his iron arms, she had to listen. Her imagination flared to torturing life as all ability to struggle, to cry out, failed her.

"There are so many creatures of the sea that will come starved to rob you of this beauty you love. It would be a waste of time for your latest adorer to go on worshipping at your shrine. He shall see you day by day as you rot—and rot. I heard what he said. He shall live—and regret his living!"

Dick, watchful, not with anger, cold with terror, held in his place by baffling control, saw Wanda's profile as she passed before him—suffering—tortured.

Next time the pair came round, the colonel stopped, led Wanda to her seat, set her in it like a doll, then walked away in the direction of the band. Dick found himself unable to move a finger.

Music struck up again. An old tune. No one got up to dance. No one moved at all.

Colonel Everett stood as one crowned and robed with authority. Slowly, as if a heavy, jeweled cloak dragged at his heels, he turned and walked away.

The band played with maddening repetition. On and on wailed the sad little melody . . . *Kathleen Mavourneen* . . . on . . . and on . . . and on. . . .

On one of his half-hourly visits to Mark, Mr. Amyas saw a tall, hatefully familiar figure standing outside the room. Colonel Everett's face, barely recognizable now in its dark, lean wolfishness, confronted him with a grin.

"Very conscientious! Well, make the most of your time. You won't be sick-visiting much longer. I'll take the boy off your hands soon—very soon."

Mr. Amyas opened the door and closed it softly, abruptly in the other's face. He felt better for the small act of defiance. After midnight! . . . He choked back the cold, numbing sense of defeat that threatened, and crossed over to the bunk where Doctor Fielding watched.

"I've something to say to you," he began in a low, urgent voice. "No use telling you before—I wasn't sure of Captain Ross. And it's a remote chance anyhow. However——"

He explained briefly.

"I see." The doctor looked up, his eyes dead fires in a worn, ravaged face, "It all hangs on whether Everett *knows,* and if he does know, whether he will have the chance to communicate his vital knowledge. The only certain factor in the crisis is that Everett *as* Everett does momentarily take possession of himself again."

His companion assented.

"I admit my knowledge is limited. But I'm staking everything on it. And I have persuaded the captain to this point of view. About Mark——"

"Yes. If Everett speaks, Mark won't need the second injection. Very well. I'll wait for fifteen minutes after midnight. Then—if no message comes—I will use the needle."

The corridor was empty as Mr. Amyas went out again.

"I don't know," he confessed when he regained the bridge, "why the infernal fog leaves us alone up here. Vernon is reserving his powers, leaving us to the last—his strongest enemies. There must

be laws and barriers in every state of existence, and Vernon must be prevented from touching us—yet!"

"My first mate's given up now, driven away," the captain informed him. "There's no one at the wheel. Luckily the ship's heading north, right out of the fairway. No danger of a collision. We're going dead slow, too. Three more hours of this. Three more hours! My God, Amyas, if Everett doesn't come—doesn't tell me!"

"He will come."

"But he may not know. He may not know."

For the hundredth time Mr. Amyas reassured him. For the hundredth time Captain Ross turned to pace up and down the bridge, his ears tortured by the incessant, insistent whistle, rising to maniacal fury, then dwindling to thin, distant, unearthly piping. He had tried stuffing his ears with cotton-wool. It was useless—worse than useless. It increased the torment; his brain had felt like a hollow tube; the whistle shrieked through it, red-hot, searing as a flame.

And up and down the long, bare, gleaming deck below, to and fro, drifting, shifting, a horrible, seeking, wraith-like thing of fog loomed, hovered, eddied, wavered to nothingness, re-formed once more.

And northward through the dark sea drove the ship—haunted—lost—blind! her slow, discouraged heart beating in heavy rhythm. Northward to her doom.

ALMOST midnight. On the bridge Captain Ross and Mr. Amyas kept watch. Almost midnight. A new moon. Hard, bright stars. No wind. And the low continuous wash and ripple of following seas as the *S. S. Dragon* drove on her unguided, crooked course.

In Number 14 on deck A, its occupant moved with quick, uneasy steps. The sinuous grace, the wicked, glancing eyes were changing. Something of fear, of doubt, of grief showed every now and then, like a star's clear shining between dark clouds.

"It's very far off—very far off." His voice was crisper in spite of its note of anxious, painful doubt. "I can't remember—I don't even know what it is I must remember."

A sudden convulsive shudder took him. A sudden darkness dimmed and blurred his features. His head went back with a jerk. His hands grew taut with fingers that clenched and crisped like talons.

"Fool! Fool! What am I doing? What am I thinking? Almost midnight. A few short minutes and I will pass through. The door stands wide. I will pass through."

He glared at the tall figure reflected in the long glass of his wardrobe, leaned forward as if speaking to the image mirrored there.

"In a few more minutes I possess you utterly. Body—living human soul—all mine!"

The face in the glass returned his glare, grew gray and wavered. Its harsh and wicked lines smoothed out. Thought, emotion, effort showed in the mirrored face — stirring — changing it as wind changes the face of water.

"No! No! Stay here. You shall not go! I command. I command. I rule you now."

But the eyes in the mirror did not match the voice. They were steady, resolute, brave. And a new voice answered the challenging words.

"I am Tom Everett. I am myself. And I must speak with the captain of this ship."

He turned from the mirror. All soldier now—squared shoulders, erect, decisive, disciplined. He moved toward the door; his hand was on the latch when his body was torn and wrenched as if by torture. He fell against the wall.

"I must—speak——"

His voice grew thick and indistinct. His hands made blind, arrested movements. He lifted his feet as if he stood in quicksands and fell with a choking cry and hands at his throat. Stubbornly he dragged himself upright, dragged open the door and stumbled into the corridor. Moving more strongly now with every step he took, he made for the deck above. From the bridge Captain Ross saw him coming, heard a faint calling through the night.

"Captain! Captain! Are you keeping watch?"

"Here! On the bridge! Here, Tom, here!"

The colonel moved swiftly in reply. He seemed to slip his fetters, came running. Next moment he had gained the bridge and stood with clear gaze on his friend.

Mr. Amyas fell back. It was between these two now.

"Tell me! Tell me quickly! I am ready. I will give all I have—body and soul, to save you!"

Everett looked deep into the agonized face confronting him.

"Yes—I see you are—quite ready."

A shrill piping sounded far off—drew nearer—nearer.

"Now!" cried the colonel.

He thrust a thin, long knife, trophy of the East, into Captain Ross's hand.

"We must go together. We must fight him together, afterward! Will you come with me?"

Below, the decks were blotted out. Fog rolled up . . . blind white world of terror . . . closing in with the whistling, tearing shrieking of the damned.

Captain Ross took the knife, grasped it strongly. Understanding, then profound triumphant joy illumined his worn face.

"Ah! Now I see the way! Wait for me, Tom! Together . . . yes! . . . together!"

He flung up an arm and struck with sure, strong aim. Everett fell, the knife deep in his heart. The captain pulled his sharp blade free again, stood up. One tremendous shout—thunder-clap bellowing above the wind's shrill squeal. The bright blade flashed again, sank to its hilt in the captain's own broad breast.

As he fell, stars and moon and foaming sea were blotted out from Mr. Amyas. The night was filled with the howl of rushing winds. Blackness descended. The ship spun crazy and demented under him.

In mortal terror he heard the thrashing roar of battle all about him. His heart grew colder than his icy hands. A world of yelling darkness where all the winds of hell tore loose.

But louder than winds, high above the devilish tumult shrilled the whistle, ceaseless, shrieking its menace, its everlasting hate. . . .

Utter silence. Silence, huge as the empty dawn of time. A wide, sweet sense of freedom filled the universe.

The watcher stood, breathing the clean salt wind, blessing friendly stars and moonlit water.

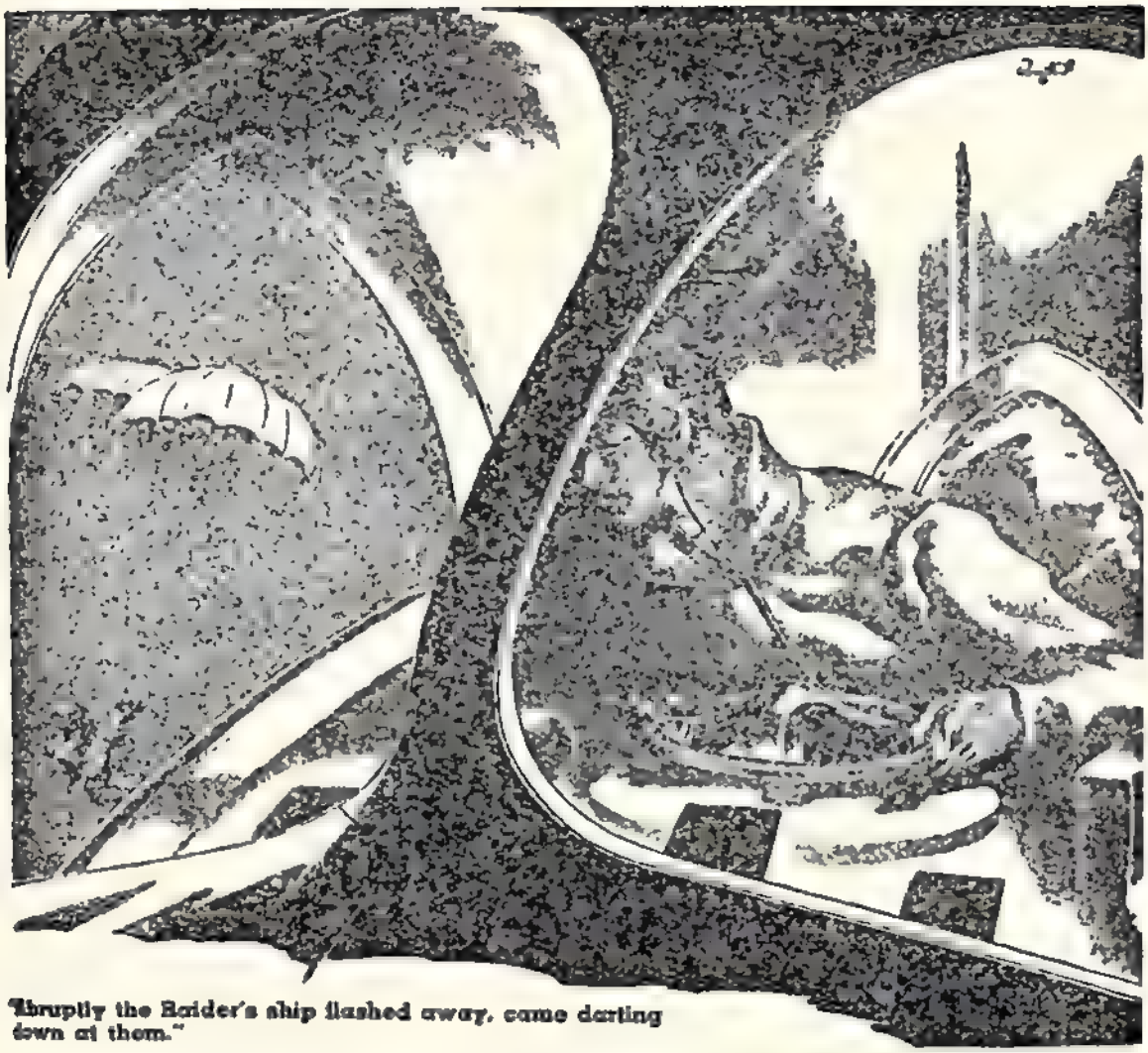
He woke like a dreamer and looked at his watch. Five minutes—only five minutes that agony had endured after all!

He knelt by the quiet dead, profoundly sleeping, utterly at rest. They were freed as Mr. Amyas knew himself to be. The dark soul of Eldred Vernon was destroyed.

To Howard Phillips Lovecraft

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Lover of hills and fields and towns antique,
How hast thou wandered hence
On ways not found before,
Beyond the dawnward spires of Providence?
Hast thou gone forth to seek
Some older bourn than these—
Some Arkham of the prime and central wizardries?
Or, with familiar felidæ,
Dost now some new and secret wood explore,
A little past the senses' farther wall—
Where spring and sunset charm the eternal path
From Earth to ether in dimensions nemoral?
Or has the Silver Key
Opened perchance for thee
Wonders and dreams and worlds ulterior?
Hast thou gone home to Ulthar or to Pnath?
Has the high king who reigns in dim Kadath
Called back his courtly, sage embassador?
Or darkling Cthulhu sent
The Sign which makes thee now a councilor
Within that foundered fortress of the deep
Where the Old Ones stir in sleep,
Till mighty temblors shake their slumbering continent?
Lo! in this little interim of days,
How far thy feet are sped
Upon the fabulous and mooted ways
Where walk the mythic dead!
For us the grief, for us the mystery. . . .
And yet thou art not gone
Nor given wholly unto dream and dust:
For, even upon
This lonely western hill of Averoigne
Thy flesh had never visited,
I meet some wise and sentient wraith of thee,
Some undeparting presence, gracious and august.
More luminous for thee the vernal grass,
More magically dark the Druid stone
And in the mind thou art for ever shown
As in a wizard glass;
And from the spirit's page thy runes can never pass.



"Abruptly the Raider's ship flashed away, came darting down at them."

Raider of the Spaceways

By HENRY KUTTNER

A startling weird-scientific story, about the fantastic and horrible entity that lay like a cosmic vampire on the hideous Night Side of Venus

1. The Raider Strikes

DAL KENWORTH was collecting the nectar from his elysia plants and swearing quietly as he worked. He was perspiring in spite of the rain, for it was the steady warm drizzle that falls constantly on the sunward side of Venus. Thank heaven, he would be free to return to earth when the collection ship came to pick up his elysia—but the ship was not due for a week. He bent the tiny dead-white cup of a bell-shaped elysia flower, and a single drop

fell into the transparent tube he held ready to receive it.

Kenworth had scarcely a gill of the fluid to show for a year's toil on Venus, but it was a good yield, and would be worth seven work-units when placed on the market in N'yok—fifteen thousand dollars, by ancient reckoning. The almost magical properties of elysia as a super-nerve-tonic made it invaluable, for it could be grown only on the scattered islands of the Great Sea of Venus.

The televisor whistled shrilly from the dome-shaped building that was Kenworth's home. He screwed the top on the tube of elysia and went to the house, swung in through the door. He clicked the button that vacuum-sealed the room and released a welcome stream of pure, cold air. Then he touched the televisor switch.

On the screen a face sprang out in sharp detail—paper-white, streaked with crimson. The boyish features were twisted with pain, the dark eyes torture-filled.

"Dal!" a voice croaked from the receiver. "Dal—the Raider!"

Ice gripped Kenworth's heart as he recognized the boy—Jene Trenton, who, with his sister, farmed an elysia garden thirty miles away. The—Raider? Scourge of the spaceways, ruthless pirate of three planets and their moons—why was the Raider on Venus? What was Jene whispering into his transmitter?

"He—he's seized the collection ship! I—didn't know—gave him my elysia—then——" The boy coughed blood, clutched at his throat. He went on swiftly, weakly. "He saw Thona! Took her—he——"

The boy toppled. His face came rushing up at the screen, eyes blankly shut. Kenworth was suddenly aware that he was shouting into the transmitter, mouthing frantic questions. The boy's eyes opened, stared into Kenworth's.

"Save her—Ken——"

His eyes closed. Blood seeped from his mouth as his jaw fell.

Kenworth saw that he was dead.

A warning throb came from the televisor. Kenworth sprang to the door, flung it open. Against the gray clouds, dim in the rain, a black oval grew larger—the collection ship, swiftly descending. And within it—Thona Trenton and the Raider!

Kenworth found a gas-pistol—a stubby, flat weapon that was dangerously effective at close range—and a ray-tube, deadly, no longer than a pencil. He went back to the televisor and manipulated a dial. The screen went blank, was suddenly shot with a whirl of racing, blended colors.

He spoke quickly into the transmitter.

"Emergency ether-call! This is Dal Kenworth, son of President Kenworth of the Americas. The Raider is on Venus. He has seized the collection ship and is landing on my elysia farm. He has a hostage on board. Send fighting-ships at once. I'll try to hold him here."

Kenworth moved the dial, touched a switch. Immediately the screen lighted up, showing his own face. His voice came from the transmitter.

"Emergency ether-call! This is Dal Kenworth——"

Satisfied, Kenworth shut off the televisor receiver. That message would continue to be sent out into the ether until the sending apparatus was shut off or destroyed. And as soon as the ships of the Interplanetary Patrol received it——

HE TURNED to the door. The collection ship, looking like a fat black cigar, was settling toward a cleared space beyond the elysia fields. As he watched it, a door in its side swung open, and a

man appeared in the portal, beckoning. Kenworth hesitated. It would not do to cause suspicion — better to behave as though he suspected nothing. He moved toward the ship.

The warm, sticky rain was unpleasant after the brief respite of the air-cooled house. Anger was mounting within Kenworth. Jene—the poor kid—shot down without a chance! Well, the Raider would meet with a different reception here.

"Got your stuff?" the man in the portal hailed.

Kenworth nodded, scrutinizing him as he approached. He saw a clean-shaven face, strong-jawed, twinkling-eyed, burned almost black by the direct rays of sun in airless space where even polaroid glass was insufficient protection. The full lips, twisted in a smile, betrayed a certain sardonic amusement. But this was not the Raider, not the hawk-faced, cold-eyed man whose portrait was on the news-boards of a thousand space-ships.

Kenworth decided to play a bold hand. This man would be as anxious to avoid suspicion as was Kenworth. The pirate stood blocking the doorway with his huge bulk, his hand extended. His voice was low, deep.

"Let's have it," he said.

Kenworth took a small flask from his pocket, and then, hesitating, thrust it back. "Let's get the other matter cleared up first," he said.

The pirate's cold eyes flickered.

Kenworth looked surprized. "Didn't Lanna tell you?" he asked. "Isn't Lanna here?"

"No. He—was called to N'yok on urgent business."

Kenworth nodded. "I see. Well, it's about that unreported elysia farm. I've located it."

He saw the other hesitate, and pressed his advantage swiftly. "Let me come in —I'll show you the spot on your chart. And you can give me the receipt for my elysia."

Taking his host's assent for granted, he moved forward. The other stepped aside. Kenworth knew that his gas-pistol was hidden from view beneath his jacket, but he took pains to let his hands swing in plain sight. He had been in the ship before, knew the way to the control room. He went there swiftly, conscious of sharp eyes on his back.

Seated at a desk was a slender man, his hair iron-gray, dressed in the conventional flexible black leather of the spaceways. He stood up quickly as Kenworth entered.

Kenworth held himself rigidly in check, knowing that he dared not give the Raider a hint of anything amiss. He stared at the other briefly, and then nodded.

"I'm Dal Kenworth," he said, and tossed his elysia vial on the desk. "I can show you where that lost elysia farm is—I spoke to Lanna about it."

The other did not answer. His eyes probed into Kenworth's, black and cold as glacial ice. His face was austerely handsome, tanned as black as his companion's, and seamed with harsh lines. Kenworth had never seen a face so impassive, so capable of concealing all emotion.

At last he spoke. "Good. Lanna told me of it." His voice was flat, toneless, yet with a curious crispness. He clipped his words oddly.

Kenworth nodded, turned to the chart table. He ran his finger over it as though searching.

"You may have a fight on your hands," he said casually. "The chap's been trying to smuggle his elysia off Venus. Only two men this trip? I'll come along if you want."

He examined the chart, his heart in his mouth. Behind him came the flat, cold voice of the Raider.

"That's all—just two, Arn and I. But we can handle it. Gas him out if necessary, or use the ship's ray-tube. Thanks anyway."

About to answer, Kenworth felt something touch his leg. He glanced down—and jumped back, suppressing a cry. The Raider chuckled, and the other man echoed him with a gusty laugh.

"Never seen an octan before? Guess you've never been on Mars."

Kenworth grinned, although he felt a little thrill of repugnance go through him as he stared down at the octan—that strange hybrid of Mars, where so many originally submarine creatures had evolved to land-dwellers as the oceans shrank. Once, millions of years ago, the octan's ancestors had dwelt in the Martian seas. Emerging on land, they had eventually becoming dwarfed to the size of small terriers. The thing's round body was covered with a growth of short, reddish fur, and perched atop it was a globe of a head, with two unwinking, baleful eyes set above a parrot-like beak. Its limbs were tentacles — eight of them, furred, and lined with the atrophied remnants of suckers. Although Kenworth knew that the octan was tamed, not dangerous, he could not suppress an involuntary shudder.

THE octan moved toward him, scuttling like a spider on its tentacle-limbs, and then paused, as though sensing his dislike. It gave a shrill whistling cry and ran back, climbing a leg of the desk and crouching atop it.

Kenworth saw that the two men were watching the octan. His chance, then, had come, and if the Raider had spoken the truth, there were only two on the ship—besides the girl, who no doubt was a captive. He snatched the ray-tube from his jacket, drew the gas-pistol with his other hand.

"Up!" His voice cracked like a whip-lash, peremptory, challenging.

The big man snarled a surprized oath, made a hasty gesture—and paused, lifting his hands. The Raider's hands were already in the air. Frightened, the octan leaped from the desk and scuttled from the room. A little feeling of apprehension went through Kenworth. But what harm could the repulsive creature do?

The larger man said, "What's this? You can't——"

The Raider interrupted him. "Don't bother, Arn. He knows who we are." Yet Kenworth sensed puzzlement in the Raider's eyes.

Kenworth said, "Where's the girl? Thona Trenton?"

The Raider smiled slightly. "She's safe, in a compartment aft. I took her because of Arn. He's a faithful lieutenant, and deserves some reward—and he said that he wanted her."

Kenworth felt rage rising within him, fought it down. He said coldly, "You'll take——"

The Raider interrupted. "You should not have let the octan go," he smiled, amusement in his eyes. "Ruthlessness and logic are the only laws by which one can live. And it was not logical to let the octan go—the creatures are more intelligent than most people think. Surely you did not think I'd fall into your trap and tell you how many I had on this ship! Vakko—use half-strength only. There are things we must learn from our guest."

And the Raider, his hands still held high, nodded, his eyes intent on some object beyond Kenworth!

2. Flight

KENWORTH was in a quandary. He dared not turn, for the Raider might be waiting for just that opportunity. On the other hand, if there was an enemy behind him——

He pivoted very slowly, keeping his weapons aimed at Arn and the Raider. He caught a flicker of movement out of the corner of his eye—and leaped back, swinging the ray-tube.

He was too late. A paralyzing shock went through him — the half-strength energy of the ray-tube—and the weapons dropped from his nerveless hands. He crumpled, fully conscious, but unable to co-ordinate his movements — suffering, actually, from a severe electric shock. Arn sprang forward, snatched up the gas-pistol and the tube.

The Raider chuckled. Another man came into view—a Martian, seven feet tall, huge-chested, with arms and legs thin as pipe-stems, his round face, with its tiny mouth and bulging eyes, like some ludicrous mask.

"Good!" the Raider said. "Good, Vakko. As for you, Arn—you would do well to learn from Vakko."

The Martian giggled shrilly, apparently delighted. He piped something Kenworth could not understand, and at the Raider's nod lifted Kenworth easily and laid him on a leather couch. There was surprizing strength in those slender, brittle-seeming arms, with their thick growth of red fur.

The Raider gave a command, and Arn hurried away. Kenworth tried to move, but there was no feeling in his body. The effects of the ray, he knew, took some time to wear off. The Raider came close, staring down into Kenworth's eyes.

He said slowly, "You should be thankful I told Vakko—half-strength!"

Arn returned, and at his side was a girl — gray-eyed, dark-haired, whose beauty was scarcely marred by the traces tears had left on her cheeks. As Kenworth recognized Thona Trenton he made an effort to speak, managed only an inarticulate croak. The girl flew to his side.

"Dal! What's—are you——"

"A little ray treatment," the Raider said gently.

Thona flashed a furious glance at him, looked down again at Kenworth. She said, choking back a sob: "They've killed Jene, Dal!"

Kenworth managed to nod. Too late he saw his mistake. The Raider's eyes narrowed, and he exchanged a quick glance with Arn.

"How did you know that?" he asked quietly.

Then, realizing that Kenworth could not answer, he spoke to the Martian, who knelt by Kenworth and began to massage his body with his slender, powerful fingers. Life began to flow back into Kenworth's veins, hastened by Vakko's ministrations. After one or two attempts he found his voice.

"It's all right, Thona," he told the girl, with an assurance he did not feel. "There's no danger."

"And how does he know *that?*" the Raider asked, apparently of the bare wall.

He snapped his fingers suddenly, sprang to the televisor. As he clicked it on, Kenworth's face appeared on the screen, and his voice rang through the room.

"——farm. He has a hostage on board. Send fighting-ships at once. I'll try to hold him here." There was a pause, in which the harsh breathing of Arn was plainly audible. Then the voice from the transmitter resumed. "Emergency ether-call! This is Dal Kenworth, son of President Kenworth of the Americas——"

The Raider waited for no more. He leaped for the control board, barking orders at Arn, who raced from the room. The ship quivered, lifted. The Raider fingered buttons, swung a lever. Abruptly the televisor screen went blank. Kenworth knew that the space pirate had rayed the house, destroying the televisor.

THONA was staring at Kenworth. "You're — President Kenworth's son?"

He nodded, flushing. "I—yes, Thona. I didn't tell you—I thought it might—make a difference."

"But—why? The son of President Kenworth on an elysia farm!" There was amazement in her eyes.

"As a matter of fact, it was a wager. A chap and I got into an argument—a commander of the Interplanetary Patrol, an old friend of my father's—and he bet me that I was too soft to raise a crop of elysia. Lord knows it's no easy job!" He lowered his voice. "I don't think I could have stuck it out, Thona, if I hadn't met you. Now don't worry. The Raider won't dare——"

"I won't dare?" The Raider stood over them, his eyes glittering in his mask-like face. "I won't kill you—no. Neither of you. I'm tempted, I confess—but if worst comes to worst I can always bargain. And the son of President Kenworth——"

He paused, while Kenworth cursed himself for revealing his identity.

Arn came forward, frowning. He gestured to the controls, said something under his breath. The Raider nodded impatiently.

Arn said, amazement on his dark face, "You're going to do it?"

"Yes. They'll expect me to leave Venus to escape. We can't take the chance of going back to our own ship—and I won't go into space in this leaky boat. Nobody will expect us to go to the Night Side."

Thona gasped, and her hands flew up to her cheeks. Even Kenworth paled.

Arn said unbelievingly, "We're going —to the Night Side?"

Kenworth understood his apprehension, shared it. Ships stayed on the sunward side of Venus. There was a mystery about the Night Side—the half of Venus turned perpetually away from the sun, blanketed by thick clouds and shunned by the wanderers of the spaceways. There had been a time, long ago, when expeditions had set out to explore the Night Side. They had never returned. They had gone into the enigmatic blackness armed with huge ray-tubes and gas-projectors—and had vanished.

Of the Night Side only one thing was known—no one had ever returned from it. And it was to this hidden land of eternal blackness that the Raider was guiding his ship!

Kenworth revised his opinion of the Raider as he saw Arn turn away without another word. The Martian, watching Kenworth with ray-tube in hand, said nothing. The octan scurried into the room and rubbed against Vakko's legs, and he reached down absently to stroke it. It shrilled its pleasure. Kenworth felt Thona shudder against him.

"Keep an eye out for ships," the Raider commanded, and Arn nodded, went to the control board.

Ignoring Kenworth, the Raider picked up the little vial of elysia from the desk. He unbuckled his leather jacket, fumbled with a thick, tubular belt he wore about his waist. It was transparent, filled with the pale elysia fluid, Kenworth saw. The Raider added Kenworth's gill of the liquid to his own stock.

"It's a fabulous fortune," he said pleasantly in his toneless voice, meeting Kenworth's gaze. "Curious that people are willing to pay so much for—emotion. That's what it is." He eyed the belt ruminatively. "Pure emotion. A scientist once explained its action to me, but I couldn't understand him, except that it seems to step up the emotions—the pleasurable sensations.

"Elysia!" he went on almost dreamily. "It's well named. Back in the Twentieth

Century men used morphine and—what was it?—cocaine—to allay pain and excite pleasurable sensations. But they were drugs, and harmful. One drop of elysia will give a man days of almost unendurable ecstasy—and the feeling will last for years, wearing off only very gradually. And a larger dose will kill." He slapped the belt, chuckling. "It's lucky I'd collected from most of the farms before you intervened, Kenworth."

Arn said, "We're near the Twilight Zone now. The——" He broke off, snarled a lurid Martian oath. *"Th'gadda!* A ship—two miles off! Coming this way!"

KENWORTH sat up hastily. The Martian moved closer, his ray-tube ready. The octan tried to climb up Vakko's leg, but he kicked it away impatiently.

The Raider went to the controls. He touched a button, and the televisor screen lit up, showing the outline of a ship, torpedo-shaped, bearing the insignia of the Interplanetary Patrol—three circles, intertwined.

"Interference!" the Raider said quietly. "Blanket their signals."

Arn growled assent. On the edges of the screen a flickering nimbus of pale light grew, darting and writhing inward, oddly reminiscent of the sun's corona. Kenworth knew that the Patrol ship could not now send a message for aid. He prayed that such a message had already been sent.

Thona touched his arm. He turned to her.

"I thought—hostages——" she whispered, her mouth close to his ear.

"Maybe later," he murmured in response. "Right now he wants to make his getaway. We're being kept only as a last resort. He must be pretty sure of himself."

The Raider's ears were preternaturally quick. Without turning, he said in his flat voice, "I am. Quite sure. Watch the screen, and learn how spacemen fight!"

3. *Battle—and Escape*

THE conflict began. Strange air battle of the Twenty-third Century! Soundless struggle of deadly rays guided by trained, quick-thinking minds! As Kenworth watched the swift, deft movements of the Raider and his lieutenant, he began to understand the reasons for the space-pirate's reputation. For the Raider was playing with the Patrol ship, playing with it so deftly that the attacker did not realize its own impotence. And Kenworth knew that the ships of the Interplanetary Patrol were not manned by fools—no! To command a Patrol ship was a high honor—and one not easily gained. Yet the diabolical cunning of the Raider had the Patrol ship at his mercy.

The flickering rays still nimbused the screen, dimming and flashing out again as the clashing rays of the two ships flared—invisible rays of paralysis and death! The heavy armor that plated the ships could resist a certain amount of raying, but if a ship remained in the path of a beam for more than a few seconds, the ray would penetrate the armor and reduce the crew to a state of helpless paralysis. Kenworth saw that the Patrol ship was not using the death-rays, no doubt because the Patrol Commander knew or suspected the existence of the Raider's hostages. And the Raider, too, was using his rays at half-strength only. Kenworth, an expert at space piloting, cursed under his breath as he watched the Raider send his craft through a breath-taking series of whirls and dives. He realized that when the Raider decided to strike, he could almost instantly ray the Patrol ship out of existence.

But why was he delaying? What was

he planning? There was no hint of his intentions on that gaunt, immobile face.

The mad spins and lurches of the ship did not discommode the passengers, due to the artificial gravity field existing within the craft. But, watching the madly flaring screen, Kenworth saw the Patrol ship slip aside and vanish, saw the jagged peaks of a mountain range come rushing up, dim in the grayness of the Twilight Zone. The ship was falling!

A voice boomed through the cabin. "Surrender, Raider! Kill your rays!"

A tight smile flickered over the Raider's face. He said in a swift aside, "Arn, keep the interference on."

Arn grunted, little beads of perspiration standing out like jewels on his space-blackened face. Kenworth felt Thona huddle against him. For a moment a thrill of fear went through him, but a glance at the screen was instantly reassuring. The mountains seemed to be stopping their mad march toward the ship, slowing down. The Patrol craft lurched into view. Abruptly it began to recede in a series of curious little jumps.

Kenworth knew that this was illusion. The Raider was fleeing, and the screen darkened steadily, with the pursuing Patrol ship a black silhouette against the pale gray sky. The titanic mountains of the Twilight Zone dimmed, faded to darkness. They were entering the Night Side.

The Raider clicked over a switch. The dead blackness of the screen lightened, showed the Patrol ship. But there was a curious lack of perspective, of color. It was a shadow-picture, two-dimensional and unreal. Ultra-violet rays were responsible. All space-ships were equipped with them, Kenworth knew. Invisible light, making a strange shadowland of the blackness!

And now Kenworth realized the Raider's plan. The nimbus of light still flickered on the screen, and the Patrol ship could not summon help, for the Raider's interference mechanism blanketed the other ship's signals. The Raider might have destroyed his attacker in the Twilight Zone—but that would have left the Patrol ship's wreck to attract attention, pointing a definite finger of suspicion toward the Night Side. Pretending to be crippled, the Raider was luring his enemy into the hidden blackness of Venus—and there he would strike!

Kenworth began to search the room with his eyes, methodically seeking several devices which he knew should be in the control chamber. A plan was forming in his mind—but he would have to act quickly. Luckily he had been in the collection ship before, and it was not long before he saw a rack of small tubes on the wall, tubes that resembled the paralysis-ray projectors, but which were in reality light-tubes. And light would be vitally necessary on the Night Side—if they could escape from the ship.

Kenworth located, too, a shelf on which a dozen small packages were piled—parachutes, made from the incredibly tough filaments spun by the Cave Spiders of Mars. He put his arm unobtrusively around Thona, drawing her close. She looked up inquiringly.

He prisoned one of her small hands in his big one. Then, his eyes on the Martian, he pressed his thumb against Thona's palm, released it. Vakko did not move. His bulging eyes stared emotionlessly at Kenworth. Using the Interplanetary Code—adapted from the archaic Morse—which every citizen had to learn, Kenworth began to give Thona a message. *Dot*—a brief pressure—*dash*—a longer one——

"When I give the word, get light-tubes and parachutes." Swiftly he indicated where they were.

Thona's eyes did not flicker. The an-

swering pressure of her warm fingers gave Kenworth the message, "I understand."

Now they were far into the Night Side, racing through the blackness from the Patrol Ship. Another screen had been put into operation, for the Raider did not care to crash blindly upon an uncharted mountain peak. But at this height there was little danger of such an accident.

Kenworth watched the Raider, and took the opportunity to send another message to Thona.

"Now!" the Raider said, the word coldly metallic. He touched a lever, flung over a switch.

Arn growled, "Good! Then we can get out of this—darkness."

The Raider said nothing. On the screen the Patrol ship grew larger. Rays leaped out—invisible, detectable only by the reactions of delicate indicating instruments. The Raider's face grew intent, like a mask cut out of black stone.

The Martian's eyes flickered toward the screen.

Kenworth moved. Like an uncoiling spring he shot toward Vakko, smashing against the Martian's pipe-stem legs. Vakko toppled. The ray-tube was jerked from his hand, went spinning across the room. He screamed in an oddly piercing, shrill voice.

Thona was running across the room. The Raider swung about, and as he moved a grinding crash rasped through the ship. The pirate wheeled, his fingers darting lightning-like over the controls. His momentary inattention had almost lost him the battle with the Patrol ship.

"Arn!" His command stopped the big lieutenant, brought him, too, back to the controls. "Get the Patrol ship!" he snapped. *"Quick!* Then——"

Kenworth had counted on this. In the crisis, the final battle between the two ships, the Raider would need both Arn and himself at the controls—would not dare turn to face a lesser peril, knowing that a moment's inattention would mean disaster. Already there was a warning tingling shuddering through Kenworth's body—the first taste of the Patrol ship's paralyzing rays, lancing through the protecting armor!

He snapped a vicious blow at the Martian's pouchy chest, and Vakko shrieked his pain. But the deceptively slender arms did not relax, and, cursing, Kenworth drove blow after blow into the Martian's body. He heard a shrill piping, and felt something whip across his eyes. Tentacles wound about his head, and a vicious beak stabbed at his face. The octan!

He put all his strength into a sledgehammer blow that smashed bones in the Martian's chest. The binding arms relaxed, and Kenworth leaped to his feet, tore away the octan's tentacles. The parrot-like beak snapped viciously at his hand, and the thing squealed in futile rage. He flung it from him, turned.

He had a flashing glimpse of a maelstrom of titanic forces racing across the televisor screen. The Raider was still at the control board, his fingers darting to and fro. Arn was on his feet, plunging toward him, gas-gun leveled.

Thona was gone. Kenworth spun, leaped for the doorway. Something popped near his head, and a cloud of greenish gas sprang into existence, writhing as though alive. He got through the door, holding his breath, and swung it shut. A precious moment was wasted while he searched for a bolt that was not there. Then he turned and went racing along the corridor.

"Dal!" It was Thona's voice. "Dal—here!"

She was standing by an open oval of emptiness through which a blast of rac-

ing wind screamed. She made a quick movement with her hand, threw something out of the ship. Light flared. It was a light-tube, hurtling downward, lighting the dead blackness of the Night Side.

Kenworth adjusted the parachute Thona handed him, saw the tumbled surface of land far below. He heard Arn shouting, and a gas-pellet burst against the wall. But the greenish vapor was instantly dissipated by the rushing blast. Kenworth seized Thona's hand and they leaped together out into space.

A WARNING tingling sent fear darting through Kenworth. Away from the protecting insulation of the ship, the paralyzing rays were bathing them. Realizing that this would happen, Kenworth had determined not to open the parachutes until they had fallen beneath the range of the rays. But would the fall be swift enough to save them? Would they become paralyzed—unable to open the parachutes?

The tingling ceased; in the white flare the ground rushed up at them. With a word to Thona Kenworth touched the stud that opened his parachute. The two 'chutes blossomed together.

Above them the ships whirled and spun and dived in mad conflict. Abruptly the Raider's ship flashed away, came darting down at them. Kenworth could guess what was in the Raider's mind. His hostages were invaluable—he dared not lose them. But to land and recapture the two meant laying himself open to the Patrol ship's attack.

The Raider fled, was lost in the darkness. The other ship slanted down. Kenworth could guess, too, what lay in the mind of the Patrol ship's commander. Like the Raider, he wished to land, to pick up the two refugees. But he would realize that the moment his ship touched the soil of Venus, his defenses down, the Raider would come swooping out of the shadows, his rays working deadly havoc before the other ship could be lifted from the ground.

The landscape swayed, rocking as they drifted down. Now the light-tube was dying. Even the tempered metal of the tube had been unable to withstand the impact. But the light had served its purpose. It had revealed the landing-place.

Rock. Great plains of rock, fantastically colored, with here and there small patches of the dull gray soil of Venus. Over all lay a silvery sheen, the brilliant sparkle of frost. An icy chill struck through Kenworth. The Night Side, turned perpetually from the sun, would naturally be cold—but the wonder was that it was not colder than this. Then he realized the solution—the dense atmosphere that blanketed the Night Side from the utter chill of airless space.

They touched the ground, rolled over. Kenworth helped Thona up, brushing white frost from her garments. He hesitated, glancing around.

Thona, completely invisible as the last traces of the light died, groped closer.

"Dal!" she said, a curious note of fear in her voice. "Dal! Do you feel—something strange?"

4. *Spawn of Darkness*

KENWORTH knew what she meant. Yet the sensation was utterly unreal, fantastic. It was like a queer sensation of movement within his brain—provoking some half-forgotten memory—now evading him, now swimming into view——

He had it! Once, in N'yok, he had attended a council of telepathists, that small group of scientists who had devoted their lives to experimenting with telepathy. And it was there that Kenworth had ex-

perienced a sensation similar to this inexplicable *motion* within his brain.

Remembering the theories of the telepathists, he threw his mind open, made it blank, receptive. But no message came. Only breaking in through the darkness came Thona's voice.

"Dal! Where are you?"

Shaking his head, he looked around, blinded by the darkness, realizing that he had unwittingly moved forward a few paces. As he answered, a little ray of light flickered on, and in its light he saw Thona near by, holding a light-tube in her hand. At his surprized glance she smiled, and said,

"I managed to get two of them." Then she sobered. "What is this—sensation? It feels as though something's pulling at my brain!"

Kenworth started. That had been his own sensation, exactly. And, indeed, under its guidance he had moved forward.

He told Thona of the telepathy theory. "The scientists have often conjectured on the possibility of a race existing without oral speech, speaking by thought-impulses alone. It's not as fantastic as it seems—indeed, they've proved the possibility of telepathy." He took the light-tube from Thona, adjusted it until only a faint glow shone out. "We'd better move, Thona. If the Raider destroys the Patrol ship—as I think he will—he'll be back. And he mustn't find us here."

A shadow fell on Thona's face. "But how can we get back? It's impossible, Dal—it may be thousands of miles even to the Twilight Zone!"

Kenworth smiled with an assurance he did not feel. "We can make it. It'll be quite a walk, but—have you your food tablets?" Every citizen was required by law to carry a packet of these concentrated food pellets, and Thona pulled a flat metal container from her pocket.

"What about water, though?" She answered her own question as the light gleamed on the frost-rime on the rocks. "The ice—of course. But what about direction?"

Kenworth glanced up, but the stars were hidden by the thick cloud-masses. He switched off the light, waited for his eyes to grow accustomed to the darkness. Then he touched the girl's arm.

"There, Thona. See?" Abruptly he realized that she could not see his pointing finger, and fumbled for her head, felt the soft curls beneath his fingers. He turned her head slowly. "Do you see that glow—very faint, though—far away on the horizon?"

"No . . . oh, yes. But it's scarcely visible."

"Doesn't matter." Kenworth hesitated. A little warning premonition went through him. The light was strangely blue-tinged to be the daylight of Venus. But what other explanation could there be to this light on the Night Side?

"Well, come on," Thona said. But after a few steps she paused, staring at Kenworth. He nodded.

"Funny. I felt it, too. That—queer feeling in my head is gone. I wonder——"

But it was useless to conjecture. Haste was necessary, and for a time the two hurried on in utter silence, climbing over jagged rocks, slipping more than once on the frost-rime that lay like a fantastic arabesque over everything. It was cold, but no colder than a N'yok winter, and the exercise of walking warmed them.

They had been walking for almost two hours, by Kenworth's wrist chronometer, when they saw the strange white thing. It lay like a great pale pancake nearly two feet in diameter, on a flat surface of grayish soil. For a space about it there was no frost on the ground, and as the two approached they could

feel a faint, gentle warmth radiating from the thing.

It had only one feature, a branch-like arm projecting vertically from the center, about a foot long. And the creature—whatever it was—was not immobile. It pulsated gently.

"Careful," Kenworth said. "It's a plant of some sort, I think."

"It's alive," Thona commented.

Kenworth moved forward, touched the spongy, rubbery surface of the thing. The pulsations continued undisturbed.

"Curious," he said. "But not much help. We need a guide, not a plant."

He turned away, checked himself at Thona's astonished exclamation.

"Look!" She was pointing at the plant. Kenworth stared.

The vertical branch projecting up from the white pancake was no longer vertical. Its tip was bent at a right angle.

"It's—pointing," Thona said.

"Impossible! How could a plant——"

The branch moved slowly until it was again upright. Then it bent down again—jerked for all the world like a pointing finger!

"It's pointing, Dal."

He was not convinced. "No . . . but flowers turn with the sun sometimes, don't they? This may be something similar——"

From the gloom came a startling sound—a sharp, sudden bark, abruptly chopped off. Kenworth whirled. It came again—a hoarse shouting. And it repeated over and over the single word:

"Dal! Dal! Dal!"

The two stared at each other. As the voice paused Thona whispered. "The Raider?"

Kenworth shook his head, frowning, puzzled. He took a step in the direction of the voice, noticing that it was there that the plant-branch was pointing. Thona kept close to him.

About fifty feet away they came out into a little plain of gray soil, ringed with garishly colored rock. The place was quite warm, Kenworth realized with amazement. In the middle of this cleared space was another of the strange white plants—but far different from the original one.

This was huge. A dozen feet in diameter, dome-shaped, with a score of long branches shooting up from the thing's center, it lay pulsating and throbbing with life. And as the two watched, the plant began to rotate like a great turntable. It turned very slowly, until on the surface facing Kenworth and Thona appeared a group of odd appurtenances—organs, apparently. A small puckered orifice reminded Kenworth of a mouth, although it remained immobile and silent. Ringed about it were six bulging white domes. The whiteness vanished momentarily from one of them, and Kenworth saw a black shining surface. Then the pale skin covered it again.

Had the plant—*eyes?*

"What is it, Dal?" Thona asked shakily.

"I don't know," he said. "Plants have evolved considerably on Mars, I've heard, but never to this stage. I wonder if the thing can—understand us."

The puckered orifice on the plant's surface twitched convulsively, and opened. From it came an ear-shattering bellow that made Thona cry out, clapping her hands to her outraged ears. Kenworth took a step back, his eyes widening. And still the hoarse yelling kept on, rising and falling like the hooting of a siren. Abruptly Kenworth realized that there was a definite sequence in the shouting. The thing was yelling—words!

KENWORTH stopped his ears with his fingers, and suddenly the yelling faded, became articulate, understandable.

"Can—un—der—stan'! Can—un—der—stan'!"

Thona touched his arm. "He—it—says he understands!"

Kenworth was not so sure. "I don't know. Some automatic reflex of repetition, perhaps," he said, shouting to make himself heard above the tumult. Suddenly the bellowing changed.

"No—rep—i—ti—shun! Can—un—der—stan'!"

"Ye gods!" Kenworth said. "The thing's intelligent!"

And yet—why not? On Mars plants had evolved, under careful training had shown faint gleams of intelligence. And certainly there was a tremendous gulf between an ordinary plant and this incredibly developed plant-monster. Kenworth realized abruptly that he had seen no animal life on the Night Side. Free from the vegetable kingdom's natural enemies —grazing animals, destroying mankind— why could not a plant develop through the eons into an intelligent creature, just as man had evolved through uncounted millenniums?

And the thing unquestionably was intelligent. The hooting died away, and in the silence Kenworth increased the brilliancy of his light-tube. Again came that thunderous bellowing.

"No—no—no—no!"

The lids protecting the thing's eyes twitched. Strong lights, to this being of eternal night, was painful — naturally enough. Kenworth adjusted the light until it was a very faint glow. He said, "How is it you speak our language?"

Surprizingly, the thing shouted, "Telepathy!"

"What?" Kenworth could scarcely believe his ears. This amazing monster of an alien planet!

"Read words—in mind—Kenworth mind — Thona mind — pictures— words——"

Thona said to him, "But we don't think in words, Dal. We think in pictures."

"No, Thona. You're wrong. Really our thoughts are a combination of words and images. This thing seems to be reading the words in our minds, and seeing our thought-images, seeing what the words stand for! It's possible—indeed, the only way true thought-communication can be established. Those N'yok scientists told me——"

The bellowing roared out again. "See word-sounds — pictures — yes. Understand."

"See, Thona?" Kenworth said. "It's fantastic—but scientifically logical."

He turned to the plant-creature. "What are you? I mean—what sort——" He stumbled, paused, and the shouting interrupted him.

"Plant—no. Evolved plant—yes. Lived here always."

Kenworth asked curiously, "Are there many of you? Do you mean you've lived —*always?*"

Arbitrary time-designations would mean little to the creature, he thought. But the plant caught his meaning.

"Not—like this. Not many—no. Grow —grow——" The thundering voice paused, apparently puzzled. Then it resumed. "Other plant—you saw. Me. Part of me. Born—born—rooted to me. I—die, yes. It lives, has—babies."

Thona could not repress a giggle. Even Kenworth chuckled. Babies! Yet that was the thought the plant had read in the humans' minds—babies, indeed!

Yet Kenworth realized what the creature meant. The first plant-thing they had seen was the offspring of the great plant — connected, apparently, by an underground root. In time the mother plant—if one could use that term of a sexless, or rather bi-sexual vegetable—

would die, and the other would become independent, have "babies" of its own.

Thona said, "If it can read our minds, why does it have to talk to us—audibly?" She spoke directly to Kenworth, oddly averse to addressing the plant directly. But the thing bellowed an answer.

"No — your minds already — getting thoughts. Not from me. Cannot—me—cannot break in."

Thona turned a white face to Kenworth. "Did you hear that? It says our minds are already——"

Kenworth nodded, remembered the strange feeling he had had directly after the escape from the Raider. "I don't get any thoughts, though," he said slowly.

"Not—thoughts," the plant bellowed. "Command—urge—pull. Drags you to —to—thought-giver." A branch bent, pointing. "Light—yes, blue light—you go there."

"Then it isn't the daylight after all," Kenworth said.

Thona's lips were trembling. "We'll keep away from there, Dal. If——"

The shouting broke in. "No keep away—cannot. Drags you there. Dragged everything on—on—Night Side there—long ago. Only me—plants like me—rooted——"

The branches growing from the plant-thing's center twitched, stirred. They writhed apart, oddly like tentacles. One of the plant's bulbous eyes flickered open momentarily.

And without warning the monster struck!

5. *Power of Thought*

THE branches—no longer stiffly erect, but pliant, writhing—came racing down to Thona and Kenworth. They curled about the two, lifting them from their feet. Kenworth felt his ribs crack as the plant-tentacles tightened about him. Dimly he heard Thona scream.

He struck out at the binding branches as he was lifted, realized that he still gripped the light-tube in one hand. A sharp pain darted through his leg. He saw the tip of a tentacle boring into the flesh—saw the pallor of the plant change, become roseate, crimson. The thing was sucking blood from his veins.

Once Kenworth had seen a mouse caught by one of the giant pitcher-plants of earth. Now he realized what the mouse must have felt, helpless, drained dry of blood by the vampire plant. He struggled frantically — uselessly. Held high above the dome-shaped body of the creature, he was powerless to harm it—and the tentacles were tough as steel.

Light! The thing feared light! As the thought flashed into his brain he knew that the plant read his mind. A tentacle loosened, made a swift dart for the light-tube. But already Kenworth had made the adjustment that sent a flood of blinding brilliance glaring out from the cylinder.

Creature of the dark—to which light was a blinding agony! The thin membrane over the plant's eyes was little protection, and as the glaring radiance streamed out Kenworth felt the tentacles about him contract, twist in midair, and loosen. He slipped through them, fell, gripping the light-tube desperately. Rubbery flesh gave beneath his feet; for a moment he felt the pulsing body of the monster beneath him, and then he leaped aside.

"Thona!" he called.

A faint cry brought him to her side. She lay on the gray soil, where she had been thrown by the agonized plant. Kenworth picked her up and sprinted to safety.

But the plant was no longer a menace. Its tentacles lay like a mat of white vines

over its eyes, protecting them from the glare. Beyond the reach of the monster Kenworth put Thona down, anxiously felt for her pulse.

She was unhurt. The soft soil had broken the force of her fall. In a moment she sat up, terror in her eyes.

"We're safe, Thona," Kenworth said, conscious of the bitter irony of the words. And, echoing him, came the sound of a flat, metallic laugh.

"Quite safe. And thanks for the light. I'd never have found you otherwise."

Kenworth wheeled, just as the great bulk of the collection ship grounded near by. Framed in the open portal was the Raider, his dark face immobile. In his hand was a ray-tube.

"Don't move," he said quietly. "I can paralyze you in a moment."

Thona whispered, "The Patrol ship——"

"I destroyed it. Come!"

Thona and Kenworth exchanged hopeless glances. Then, shrugging, Kenworth moved forward. Satisfaction gleamed in the Raider's eyes.

There came a swift rustle of movement from behind him. He staggered, nearly fell. Racing out of the ship came the octan, shrilling its thin cry.

It scuttled past Kenworth and went flashing away. Kenworth clicked off his light-tube, and, thrusting it in his pocket, leaped for the Raider. He stumbled over the threshold of the ship's portal. Light flared.

The Raider stood almost beside him, a light-tube in one hand, a ray-tube in the other. He jumped back, keeping the ray-tube leveled. Kenworth, tensed to spring, realized the futility of such an attempt.

"Get in the ship," the Raider said coldly.

VAKKO, the Martian, came to the portal. He fluted a question at the Raider, who gestured into the surrounding gloom, said something in his flat voice. The Martian hesitated — and turned his head slowly, listening. Then he, too, took a step forward, another step —and raced away in the track of the octan!

"Vakko!" The Raider's voice was peremptory, menacing. He swung the ray-tube away from Kenworth, paused.

The Martian was lost in the shadows.

Arn came out of the ship. He paid no attention to the others, but simply walked off into the gloom, his pace steadily increasing.

Thona turned. She began to follow him.

The Raider was behaving oddly. He, too, stood in an attitude of listening. And throbbing within Kenworth's brain came that curious sense of movement that he had already experienced. And this time it summoned.

It called—beckoned! He felt himself swaying toward the shadows where the others had vanished. He saw the Raider's face, astonishment in the black eyes, saw light-tube and ray-tube drop from the pirate's hands. What had the plant-thing said? "Thoughts . . . command . . . drags you to thought-giver."

Like a great wave, blackness engulfed him!

THUD . . . thud . . . rhythmic thudding . . . of racing feet . . . slowly Kenworth fought back to consciousness. He saw bobbing figures outlined against a strangely blue glow before him, heard hoarse breathing. At his side was the Raider, gaunt face expressionless, running easily. But why were they running?

Realization struck home to him. The darkness that had shrouded his mind lifted. He saw his surroundings.

He was in a crater—vast, with distant jagged walls that marched like a great ramp. It was lighted by a bluish radiance that came from a mound in the crater's center—a strange mound, glistening and heaving very slowly.

The bobbing figures ahead paused. Kenworth saw the elongated silhouette of the Martian, saw Arn's bulky body, the slim form of Thona. He came up with them, stopped. The last traces of the fog lifted from his mind.

He caught Thona in his arms, fearful that she might race away again. The Martian pointed, and Arn growled an oath.

The racing form of the octan was still moving swiftly across the crater's floor toward the glistening knoll. It raced onward, flung itself on the mound—and was engulfed! It disappeared in the shining, radiant surface. The blue glow brightened briefly, faded again.

Kenworth heard the Raider cursing in a dull, hopeless monotone.

Arn said, with a curious catch in his gruff voice, "What—is that thing?"

The Raider said, "Don't you remember the Korla crater? On Mars?"

Arn paled beneath his space-burn. He said, "But this creature——"

"Is larger. Yes. A hundred times larger. But it's the same kind of being."

"What do you mean?" Kenworth broke in. "Do you know what that—creature—is?"

As the Raider glanced at him Kenworth realized that the man was an enemy, and stepped back involuntarily. But the other made no hostile move.

"I know," the Raider said. "Yes. And I know we'll all be dead very shortly." He shrugged. "I saw one of these once in a Martian crater. It's alive—but a life-form entirely alien to us. It's unicellular. I had a scientist in my crew then, and he explained it to me. Said it might have come on—or in—a meteorite, as the crater seemed to indicate. Or it might have evolved . . . it's an ameba."

Arn said slowly, "There wasn't a living thing—nothing but plants and trees—for miles around the Korla crater."

"And that thing was small — very small. Yet we felt its influence."

"Telepathy!" Kenworth said. "It sent out thought-impulses to capture us . . . but an ameba?"

"Yes. It's a unicellular creature — Janna told me—an alien life-form, developed along lines unfamiliar to us. It has no need to seek food—it draws food to it by means of its powerful thought-commands. Vakko!"

But the Martian was gone—racing across the creater floor toward the glistening mound. They watched, fascinated, as Vakko approached the creature—and was engulfed. A thin scream came to them. Then silence.

"What are we waiting for?" Kenworth snapped. "Come on!"

But he did not move. Astonishment showed on his face.

The Raider laughed grimly. "Because we can't get away. I've been trying . . . the thing's holding us with its thought-commands—dragging us to it, one by one!"

6. *In the Crater*

DESPERATELY Kenworth struggled. He could move, he found, but only in one direction—toward the shining blue mound. He could almost feel the thought-commands pressing a blanket upon his brain, slowing his movements, pulling at him—like a snake holding a bird with its hypnotic glare, drawing it closer to the gleaming fangs!

He felt Thona move, struggle to escape from his arms. He said sharply, "Thona!"

A film seemed to be over her eyes. Abruptly this vanished, and she stared at him fearfully. He held her closer.

The Raider said, "Janna—the scientist—was quite enthusiastic — wanted to study the thing closely. He nearly did for us, too. Luckily I set the controls on the ship before I lost consciousness. When I recovered we were nearly past Phobos. And that was scarcely a tenth as large as this creature!"

Arn said, "The ray-tubes——"

"We tried them," the Raider reminded him. "Don't you remember? We couldn't hurt it. Even the ship's ray-tubes failed. Janna said the thing built up some sort of resistance that shunted off the rays. The powers of such a creature!" he cried, and for the first time Kenworth heard emotion in the Raider's voice. "It's destroyed all animal life on the Night Side!"

Arn moved forward swiftly. The Raider ran after him, seized his arm. For a moment the two moved together toward the crater's center; then the Raider released Arn. Perspiration dewed his gaunt face as he turned back, but he could not retrace his steps. He stood facing Kenworth, his mouth a tight line. Abruptly he pointed.

Kenworth turned, saw a faint glow in the sky, far beyond the crater's rim.

"There!" the Raider said. "My light-tube. I dropped it by the ship. If we could escape, we could find our way back by that——"

He turned, shrugging. Arn was quite close to the blue mound now. His arm was outstretched, and Kenworth caught a glance of light on metal. Arn was raying the monster.

Useless! A little sparkle showed that the tube had fallen from Arn's hand. He sprang forward—and was engulfed!

The blue light brightened. Sparkling threads of radiance shot through the mound. It pulsated more swiftly.

The Raider looked over his shoulder. "Janna said it—eats—not so much for food as for—emotion. It can draw its food from the soil, like a plant, he said. He thought it gets some sort of unearthly pleasure from what it devours."

Incredible . . . and yet—mankind's development was both mental and emotional. Why could not this ameboid thing have developed its sense of emotion at the expense of intelligence? A mindless entity, sending out its thought-commands by instinct, as a pitcher-plant exudes its luring fluid to attract victims . . . it was possible, Kenworth knew. The blue light had flared brighter when Arn was engulfed than when the octan or the Martian had been—was that because Arn's brain was more highly developed, had given the creature more pleasurable sensations?

The creature was as far removed from an ameba as man was. On earth the ameba had changed, evolved from a unicellular being to a creature of many cells.

But if the cell had *not* divided? Its evolution would have been far different! And an ameba had no intelligence, had but the urge of hunger. Might not a creature descended directly from a single-celled ameba be an entity living for sensation alone, its hunger urge taking the place of all other pleasurable sensations? Sex? The thing was sexless!

But that the monster could be accounted for scientifically did not lessen its deadly menace. For suddenly Thona tore herself from Kenworth's arms, went racing toward the blue mound.

For a moment Kenworth stared, unmoved. Then he sprinted after her, shouting her name. Could he catch her in time?

Not twenty feet from the mound he seized her, held her tightly. She fought him furiously, and he was forced to prison her arms to her sides. She kicked him, but his tough boots saved him from injury.

And now within Kenworth's mind the blackness began to grow again. The thought-command grew more powerful, usurping his brain. He fought frantically, but still the summoning call dragged at him. He began to move toward the blue mound, still clutching Thona to him.

One half of his mind seemed to hold aloof, watching, while the other part, obeying the thought-summons, dragged him forward. Helpless bird moving toward a hungry snake's fangs! His breathing was harsh in the dead stillness.

His foot struck something, the ray-tube Arn had dropped. Somehow he bent over, scooped it up. But Thona pulled free, moved toward the waiting mound. It was nearly twenty feet high, pulsating, shot with glowing veins. Kenworth managed to lift the tube, although he felt as though he was lifting an impossibly heavy weight.

But he could not ray the monster. Thona was in the path of the beam. Moreover, Arn had tried the ray's power, and had failed. The monster had dragged him forward inexorably.

The thought flashed into Kenworth's mind, and he acted swiftly. He touched the button on the tube that adjusted the ray to half-strength, sent that paralyzing beam darting out. The blue mound was not troubled; but Thona stopped, crumpled in a limp heap to the ground. Paralyzed—unable to obey the monster's thought-command!

Kenworth turned the tube, sent its beam tingling through his body. Ice gripped him. He fell.

There was a queer numbness in his head, and the sense of movement within his brain grew more pronounced. But he could not move. He was safe—until the effects of the ray wore off!

He looked for the ray-tube. It was beside him, and he knew that when the paralysis wore off he could seize it, send the ray through Thona and himself again. But eventually the tube would become exhausted. Death had not been avoided—it had merely been postponed.

Pacing into view came the Raider. Almost at Kenworth's side he stopped. Veins ridged his forehead with the tremendous effort he put forth. He remained like an image of stone, and Kenworth saw sweat running down his gaunt cheeks, dripping from his chin.

The terrible, silent battle went on. Still the Raider fought, glaring straight ahead at the blue mound.

It was a conflict that could have but one ending. Suddenly the Raider moved, made a hasty clutch for the ray-tube at his feet. But before he touched it he stiffened. His mask-like face turned toward the mound.

The Raider stood up.

He took a few slow steps—and rushed forward. A hoarse bellow of defiance roared out from his throat. He leaped upon the mound! The shining blue substance surged up around him in swift ameboid movement, engulfing him.

For a moment there was no change in the monster. Then, very suddenly, the blue light brightened. The sparkling veins gleamed coldly brilliant. The thing pulsated more swiftly.

The blue light shone brighter. The little veins were like white-hot threads of metal, and the pulsations became more rapid. The mound surged up! It rose into a great pillar of blazing blue light,

nd a core of intolerable brilliance began o shine within it. It throbbed and ocked with ecstasy! It shuddered with nfinite pleasure!

And Kenworth remembered — *the lysia!*

A year's supply of the drug, gathered rom hundreds of farms, had been in the ube-belt about the Raider's waist. A rop of the substance would last a man or months. What had the Raider called t? "Pure emotion . . . days of almost nendurable ecstasy."

And the belt had held a year's yield f elysia!

Throbbing, the mound rocked, blazing adiance poured from it. The core of ight in the pillar was incandescent, flaming with cold fire. It streamed out blindingly.

And the light snapped out and vanished!

Utter darkness filled the crater. Flashing light images still played on Kenworth's eyes, but these faded swiftly. He linked experimentally.

The paralysis was leaving him. The ay-tube must have been almost exhausted. Life flooded back into his veins. He fumbled in a pocket, found the light-ube he had thrust there just before the ngulfing blackness had blotted out his enses. He heard Thona stirring.

"Dal!" Her voice was frightened. He clicked on the light, saw her on her feet. His eyes widened as he stared past her.

For there lay the blue mound—no longer blue, no longer—living! Pale and translucent it lay in a shapeless pile, and within it Kenworth saw the filaments—black threads now.

Thona said, unbelievingly, "It's — dead!"

Kenworth echoed her. "Dead. The elysia did it—the Raider saved us, Thona, though he didn't know it. The creature lived on sensation—but there's a limit to everything. A dozen drops of elysia will kill a man; and that tremendous dose of the drug simply burned out the thing's life! It was like sending a billion volts of electric current through a copper wire —it burned out the nerve-tissues. It's dead, Thona!"

Her eyes were very bright as she looked up at him. He drew her close, flung out an arm toward the crater's rim where a pale glow shone in the sky.

"And there's the light-tube the Raider dropped. It'll guide us to the ship."

For a brief space they stood silent, two tiny figures lost in an immensity of blackness that pressed in from all sides—like the race of Man, on three little worlds lost in the vastness of infinity, staring out into the unknown. Then, together, they began to walk forward—symbol of man—unafraid—conquering!

The Last Pharaoh

By THOMAS P. KELLEY

A strange weird novel of a castle of doom on the West African coast—an unbelievably fascinating tale of an English girl and her American sweetheart, and the amazing fate that befell them

The Story Thus Far

SHANGHAIED to a mysterious fortress on the West African coast—the Castle of Gloom — Neil Bryant, young American, together with the lovely Carol Terry and the latter's brother, Bob, are taken to its age-old throneroom, where, amid ranks of guarding black soldiery, two human heads smile on them from bowls of stone—Atma, beauteous princess of old Egypt, and Karamour, last of the Pharaohs!

Here the surprized Terrys learn they are the descendants of the great Queen Hatshepsut, who ruled Egypt thirty-four hundred years ago. In the tale of Karamour they hear how the Queen fled before the rebellious hordes of Thothmes III, of her death in a lonely cave near Cusæ, and Atma's own escape from the rebel leader in the capital city of Memphis.

They learn of the wise Sarcus and his Golden Oil of eternal life; how the princess of Egypt and Karamour made ready for the experiment that would render them immune to the centuries; of the separating of their heads from their bodies, and then at the supreme moment, when their lifeless forms were to be plunged into the vats that would strengthen them for the ages, of the arrow that flew into the tower to bury itself in the breast of Sarcus.

Their narrator tells of the flight of his small army from the oncoming Thothmes; of their months of wandering, and the journey's end by the waters of the great sea—they had spanned the Sahara Desert. He tells of the building of the aged fortress, of his long centuries of study that he might unite once more the head of the Princess, as well as his own, each to a walking body in whose veins still flowed the royal blood of Egypt, a form appropriate to their station. Then, at last, of how the required knowledge had become his, to conclude with the words: "And that, oh strangers, is why you have been summoned!"

The story continues:

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12. Princess, or What?

AS THE last of the Pharaohs had told his enthralling story, we three prisoners sat like stone images, fascinated, while we watched the bodiless head of Karamour. The unbelievable antiquity, the glorious history of the talking head, forbade any answering retorts or protests. The ranks of guarding soldiery were quiet and motionless. Doctor Zola alone had seemed alive, and alternately his eyes rested upon us, as though to note the effects of his ruler's words.

"Perhaps, oh Prince," he drawled in his softest tone, "perhaps the stupid islanders are still in some doubt as to your meaning. Allowances must be made for their disgusting ignorance, Son of Ra. Recall you that they were even unaware

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May.

as to their ancestry; oblivious to that greatest of all honors. Truly the bodies have descended from the ancient world, but the brains hold not its wisdom. The learning of old Egypt has long since departed from the minds of the fair race."

The dark head looked at Carol, frowning.

"But surely, you must have known that you are descended from the great Hatshepsut; that your distant fathers had been kings in the halls of Kemi, five thousand years before Troy was founded?"

"And how was she to know?" demanded Bob Terry. "You yourself have admitted in this cock-and-bull story that the Queen ruled Egypt over thirty-four centuries ago. No one can truthfully trace his ancestry to such distant antiquity—it's ridiculous."

"Your mother was Egyptian," reminded Zola.

"And yours French," countered the Englishman. "But does that necessarily relate you to Joan of Arc?"

"Bah! that is all beside the point."

"This then was the dread pit so feared by the inmates of the castle."

"Damned if it is! That is all right to the point, and you know it."

"Desist!" commanded the dark head sternly. "Such conduct is both useless and improper before the last of the Oekheperkere."

His eyes flashed toward the defiant Terry. "You are wrong, young stranger, in thinking that ancestry cannot be traced to such a distant past. I have followed yours most carefully. Ah, how well was I informed through the centuries—my secret spies ever watching your forefathers as I labored and hoped for the great day when I might have need for them! And you think I do not know your departed? Listen:

"The second son of Hatshepsut's child Norfruse, a rash, impetuous youth, fled from the great palace with a dark-eyed concubine of Crete, the favorite of his father, the Pharaoh. Making their way to distant Jerusalem, his descendants remained in that ancient city till its destruction by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, some nine hundred years later. From Babylon to Damascus, from the great walls of Troy to distant Nineveh, the children of the mother Queen wandered, to return to their homeland in the reign of the Ptolemies.

"Not always was the blood of the Oekheperkere in luxury and comfort. The river of time brought many changes of position and station; jewels and silks for some generations, poverty and hunger for the others—ever swaying from the highest to the worst, with only their courage and lineage eternal.

"Often your forefathers fought as common foot-soldiers in the armies of Persia and Carthage—archers for Hannibal, warriors for Xerxes, slingers who perished on Marathon's plain."

For a moment he paused to flash his age-old eyes upon us. Then:

"Yes, bold youth, I know well your blood. I have too long watched to err at this supreme moment. Undoubtedly, you are the descendant of the great Hatshepsut."

Bob Terry gave a gesture of impatience.

"And supposing that I am—it could mean nothing to you. Egypt's glory has gone. We now live in a different age, a new environment. Must one be dragged from his home like a common felon, simply because his ancestors may have been savage rulers thousands of years ago?"

"It could mean nothing to me?" cried the dark head in surprize. "You say that it could mean nothing to me! Then, why would you suppose I have had your blood traced through the ages? Why should I secure the services of Doctor Zola, the greatest surgeon of the day, to assist me in this great venture? Why did I build this fortress over thirty-four centuries ago?"

Carol Terry staggered to her feet.

"We do not know! We do not know!" she wailed. "Words, words — always words and yet no meaning. Ten days of mental hell have passed, but still we do not know your purpose. Torture—kill if you must—but for God's sake, tell us why?"

And before I could spring forward to catch her, Carol Terry had slipped to the floor in a swoon.

I HAD lifted her to the chair, when the voice of the Pharaoh spoke again.

"It is just as well. What is to be said will no doubt fall hard on the tender ears of the golden one. Give her your attention, Doctor, while I speak to the sullen males."

"To the tower of surgery?" asked Zola, as he held the girl's limp body in his arms.

The dark head nodded, and when the Frenchman disappeared with his burden, turned his dark eyes once more upon us.

"As to the rest, I shall be brief. From the blood of the Oekheperkere I have come. It is to that royal lineage which I shall now return. I am to be free—to live, to laugh, to walk once more."

The voice sank to a trembling whisper of desire.

"I will be free—to conquer!"

Had I gone mad? Was all this some wild hallucination or a grim reality? The bodiless ruler continued:

"Yet I must return only as a Pharaoh; a true son of old Egypt in whose veins still flows the blood of the mother Queen. You, pale Englishman of the outer world, have the body I must own. It is——"

His dark eyes turned upon me. "Are you the intruder? You are he, of whom I was told? You were not summoned, nor are you a royal one?"

For the first time I spoke to Karamour:

"My being here is through no fault of my own. The lying fiend you call Doctor Zola caused my capture as he did likewise to my companions. We were betrayed through deceit and——"

"Then what is to be said is not for your ears. It is best that you be chained and held till some near-by hour, when your fate will be decided.

"Bansura!" he called to a near-by black, "take that carrion to the dungeons to be held till summoned."

"But carefully," cried the beauty from the stone bowl. "No harm must come to him if you would keep your eyes.—Fear not, man of the new land," she spoke to me. "If the eleven Gods but smile on the great experiment, your release is but a matter of hours. Truly, you have found favor in the eyes of Atma."

Why did the swarthy face of Karamour stare at me with a look of hatred?

A tall negro came forward.

"Go with him, old fellow," put in Terry, as I made ready to resist the black. "Won't do any good to try a scuffle—hundred to one against us."

"Resistance is a folly we punish severely," warned the Pharaoh.

And so it was that I submitted to be led from the golden-floored throneroom of Karamour. True, a struggle, however useless, might have been more heroic, but in the end it would have been all the same.

At the great folding doors I paused for one last look at that weird assembly, to behold all eyes upon me—the watching soldiery, the stern Egyptian monarch, and smiling Bob Terry, who waved a brave farewell.

But Atma: The eyes of the Princess had been turned toward me in an encouraging smile; a friendly beam intended to dispel any fear or foreboding that might have been mine. Yet, now as I halted and faced her, for a fleeting instant the lovely face hardened. Two exquisite brows raised slightly, and then came the one swift gesture that has ever been the world's oldest. No haughty glare, no besieging look of wordless appeal or the beguiling smile of the coquette—but a wink; a quick lowering of a long-lashed lid that needed no words to complete its apparent purpose; the meaning signal that has announced iniquity since the dawning of time; the age-old professional sign of the first Daughter of Sweetness.

HELD in the strong hands of two stalwart blacks, I was roughly hustled down a long corridor that led to the gaping entrance of a subterranean passage. Here waited another, a dark, towering Arab of war-like visage, whose curved sword hung from a heavy belt.

As we drew nearer, the tall man smiled and spoke some unknown words to the blacks that caused them to laugh loudly. Grasping a lighted torch from a niche, the grim swordsman motioned us to fol-

low, and led the way down a vast series of time-worn steps. We made our faltering way ever farther into the earth. A damp coldness told of our great distance below the surface.

We halted before a sturdy wooden door, securely held by massive iron bars. Stopping only to unlock and push the shrieking obstacle aside, we entered a low-ceilinged vault that was destined to be my prison.

The floor of the foul-smelling pit was covered with a hard, moist sand. Mighty iron rings were set in the stone walls. To these were fastened heavy chains, and at the far end of several of the chains were the attached forms of whitened skeletons.

One of these the Arab kicked ruthlessly aside. The large padlock was then opened, and the chain that had so recently held the gleaming bones of one long dead, was clasped around my ankle. For a while the three talked in an unknown tongue. Then they left, taking the light with them.

I was alone without hope of succor; alone in the deep dungeon of an ancient castle, with only drying bones of dead men for companions—men whose horrible fate I might so soon be called upon to share.

For twelve long hours of mental torment and worry I remained in the black pit of Karamour. Leaning against the rocky walls of the dungeon I thought of the strange words of the Pharaoh: "You pale Englishman of the outer world, have the body I must own. Once again may I become whole." I sought their meaning, but in vain. Why did he need us? Supposing there was some possible truth to that impossible tale, how could the Terrys help him from his hopeless predicament? What could the Englishman do that would be of any assistance to him?

My reveries were suddenly broken by a light, hesitant tread on the steps beyond. My nerves gave a sharp tingle at the sound. Was it the noise of the Arab swordsman coming to lead me to some terrible doom? Could it be some horrible beast whose keen scent had detected my presence, that was now entering to destroy me? Turning my head toward the sound, with straining eyes I awaited my unknown visitor. There was a pause beyond the doorway, and then I heard the heavy breathing of one who had come both far and fast. The door was pushed slowly open to shriek in dismal protest against this unaccustomed disturbance, and with flaming torch held high, the tall form of Captain Alexis Barakoff entered the foul dungeon.

The cruel smile that habitually lit his dark face had vanished. Instead the bearded features showed only a frightened excitement, as his restless eyes wandered incessantly to the surrounding blackness.

"You are still alive!" he whispered, with an effort.

I nodded. He swung his torch around to light every corner of that dreary dungeon.

"Not a pretty place, *Monsieur*. These gruesome pits have been haunted by the ghosts of tortured men for over three thousand years. Ghostly blue lights flicker at frequent intervals, while the great vaults are filled with a hideous laughter."

An agonized scream sounded far above us.

"Pay no attention to that, Bryant, but listen to me, as you value your life." He knelt quickly beside me, his bearded face but an inch from mine. "Answer my questions truthfully. You will find it to your advantage if you do so. Softly though—even the pits of Karamour have ears. Can you hear me?"

"I hear you."

"Good! Now, first of all, tell me, is it true what I have heard Zola say—that you are a man of great wealth?"

Instinctively I knew that the truthful answer of "no" would not only be harmful, but would discourage the Russian from further confidences. I must not relinquish this unexpected hope.

"I have money," I answered, feigning skepticism, "a great deal of it. But why speak of that now?"

A smile of relief stole over the bearded features.

"You wish to be free?" he asked.

"I don't relish the idea of starving here."

"Then listen," came the low voice. "I have been sent to return you to your former room. It is there that he intends you should stay. The great devil is maddened with joy at his new-found freedom, and has actually become gracious. Oceans of his ancient wines have been brought from the cellars for his warriors; two slaves have been given over to the tortures that make a gala holiday for the tribesmen. For once their vigilance is lax. It is at such a time that we must act.

"Tonight I leave for Havana to take on another consignment of guns. It should be a simple matter for you to drop from the balcony and evade the night guards. They will be half drunk anyway, celebrating their master's release. Once free of the castle, you could easily follow the coast line for a mile to the south, eh?"

"It should not be hard," I agreed.

"It will not be hard. Nor is it difficult for me to have the yacht halted and a small boat rowed ashore to pick you up and bring you aboard. Yes, it could be done, and I might consider doing it, though my risk is a great one."

"What do you wish in return?" I asked.

"What is your freedom worth to you?"

I could scarce suppress a smile. Even in the age-old pits of an Egyptian Pharaoh, avarice and greed were prevalent. With an effort I looked into the watching eyes of the expectant Russian.

"I will pay you well, Captain Barakoff."

"You will pay me five thousand pounds and not a ruble less. The venture is worth twice the amount, but my kind heart ever goes out to the unfortunate.

"Oh, the transaction is a simple one," he continued. "Once aboard the yacht you can wire your American bankers and have the amount waiting for us at Havana. None need ever know of our little business affair, and it will be easy for you to procure passage from the Cuban port to your own country. That is the price of your life and liberty, Monsieur Bryant. Do you agree?"

"Agreed," I answered.

The Russian bent forward, and with his ready key opened the lock that held me.

"Be careful," he cautioned. "That damned Usanti is everywhere, and reports his hearings to the Pharaoh.

"Station yourself at the window tonight, and shortly after nine, when you see the lighted yacht steam out and leave the harbor—act. A small boat will be waiting for you a mile up the beach. But come, already have we delayed too long. There must not be the slightest suspicion to arouse their ever skeptical minds."

We had started for the stairs, when I suddenly halted.

"One moment. The plan for my escape is all well and good, but what of my companions?"

My demand visibly annoyed the commander of the *Star of Egypt*.

"Well, what of them?"

"A great deal. We must arrange to

take them with us. I certainly cannot leave without them."

"Sh—not so loud, not so loud!" he hissed. "You do not realize your danger. Spies are everywhere. No, we cannot take them—the risk is too great. You must come alone. Besides—well, perhaps they would not care to come with us anyway."

An unaccountable chill of horror swept over me at his words.

"What do you mean?" I whispered, turning quickly toward him. "They have not been harmed? They are still alive?"

The bearded Russian stared stupidly at me.

"Answer me!" I shouted, an awful fear rising at his silence. "What has been done to them? Are they alive?"

The man raised his hands in a frightened, imploring manner.

"For God's sake, *Monsieur*, be quiet!" he sobbed. "He will have us thrown into the pit! Oh, you do not know him. Yes, yes, your friends are alive. They are still alive, but——" The sudden appearance of a descending black cut short his words.

The fellow's approach had been noiseless. A short, sickly-looking, repulsively ugly figure, his bloodshot eyes looked suspiciously at our startled faces.

"The great Pharaoh has commanded that I conduct the prisoner to his quarters, Captain Barakoff," he whined in a shrill voice, "and for you to report to him at once."

The Russian gave a feeble smile.

"Of course, Usanti," he faltered. "We—I—we were just leaving. Yes, of course. Come, Bryant."

As we mounted the steps, the eyes of Barakoff signaled a swift warning of silence. The man's fear of discovery was almost pathetic in his struggling efforts for a bearing of indifference. For my part, I said nothing, but that our planning had entirely escaped the ears of the black, I was doubtful.

On reaching the great corridors above, the Russian walked briskly toward the distant hall of pillars; while I, following the tiny black, was led once more to my allotted room.

13. I Talk with Atma

STANDING on the tiny balcony that led from my luxurious chamber, I could look far over the terrace below where stood the swarthy raiders of Karamour. Numerous white-robed Arabs, standing singly or in small groups, smoked their strong tobacco as they talked in the lonely gardens. Intermingled with the chatting guests were several Negro slaves, their naked black bodies a strong contrast to the snowy garments of the idlers, who silently served in tiny cups the thick, hot coffee so loved by the dark sons of the desert.

A little apart from the general group, three old sheiks looked attentively at a tall, richly robed man, whose ringing voice and imperative gestures showed him to be one of importance. Far below, in the lazy sea, the *Star of Egypt* appeared as a white dot on a world of blue.

What purpose could have brought the war-like horde to this fair Eden? The care-free laughter and friendly manner of the blacks showed that the castle had not succumbed to attack. I had heard no shouts of conflict, nor did the giant soldiery of the throneroom issue forth to repel the invaders. Plainly they were allies and followers of the bodiless ruler.

As I stood watching the shouting horde of muscular nomads, a dull, familiar noise sounded far to the north. High in the lonely Sahara sky floated the dark outline of a tiny airplane, moaning dismally. Nearer and nearer it came, till directly over the castle it circled the giant for-

tress, zooming lower as though making ready to land.

As the first sounds of the approaching plane reached them, the Arabs lapsed into a watchful silence. Dark hands shaded searching eyes, while muscular brown fingers toyed nervously with wicked-looking knives. Could it be an enemy, or had some lost flyer entered this forbidden territory?

Now, however, as the ship drew nearer and a painted white skull appeared on the under wings, all doubts vanished. The watching Arabs broke into hoarse cheering. Plainly the newcomer was both expected and welcome.

As the plane disappeared to find its landing-field behind the palace, the commanding figure shouted a brief order to his cohorts. Instantly the wild horde rushed from the gardens to greet the grim-omened flyer.

Among the last of the stragglers I noticed the running figure of the grotesque Usanti. Did his presence there mean that I was unguarded? Quickly I made for the door, to find a deserted corridor without. The landing plane had temporarily gained the attention of the castle's inmates. This, then, was the ideal moment to search for the missing Terrys, and knowing my time to be limited, I stole quickly down the silent hallway.

It was a weird sensation, this treading the unknown corridors of a Pharaoh's castle; a mighty fortress whose great foundations had been dug some fourteen hundred years before the tragedy on Calvary. It seemed as though I had suddenly been transplanted back through the centuries to a far distant day when the world was young.

At the far end of the hall a gilded door, slightly ajar, led to a large chamber, similar to my own. Into this spacious room I made my quiet way, to find caution unnecessary. The abode was empty.

A small door at the right led to a tiny balcony, from which I could see the shouting Arabs swarming around the now landed plane. There must have been a hundred of them, tall, powerful men, who pulled and laughed good-naturedly at the small bedraggled figure that descended from the cock-pit.

The flyer received their rough attentions smilingly, and shook hands with several of the company. Then, leaving the blacks to unload the many tiny brown packages from the ship's interior, the laughing horde made its slow way back to the fortress.

The marble walls around me had been recently shaded to a golden hue. That the room belonged to one of high station was evident by the costly furnishings and elaborate wearing-apparel in the clothes-press. Perhaps it was the quarters of the Pharaoh himself. But all this brought me no nearer in my quest, and I was about to leave the chamber when my eyes were widened by two almost simultaneous discoveries. The first was a loaded pistol lying on a small stand near the doorway; the other, a full-view portrait of Carol Terry that stood on the massive dresser.

The richly colored photo, undoubtedly a recent one, showed the pretty girl in a smiling, happy mood. Underneath in her handwriting I knew so well were the words: "With all my love—Carol."

Each hour but added to the mysteries of this horrible castle of gloom. The bodiless Pharaoh, the wondrous Princess; humans who had seen and known the glories of the past. Shouting fanatics who thirsted for battle; the arrival from the sky; and now the portrait of one, who, until her recent capture, had never been within a thousand miles of this ancient structure.

As I stood silent and perplexed before the startling find, loud voices in the halls below told that the swarthy com-

pany had entered the palace. Quickly pocketing the pistol, I stepped out into the still deserted corridor. At the stairway, heavy treading told of the ascending guards. The hallway would soon swarm with armed sentries, and knowing further searching to be useless, I quietly entered my own room, closing the door behind me.

The venture had not proven worthless. I had seen the landing of the desert flyer, discovered the puzzling portrait of Carol Terry; and behind the large picture over the bed, destructive and ready, was the secreted pistol, waiting for the time when I should need its powerful assistance.

LATE that afternoon a gentle knock sounded on my door as a musical voice asked softly, "May I enter?"

The frail obstacle was pushed aside, and a vision of loveliness stood in the doorway. Two indescribably beautiful long-lashed eyes rolled beneath a waving mass of black hair. Slightly parted red lips displayed a perfect row of teeth, while the tall, shapely body, richly appareled in a low-cut gown of shimmering white satin that revealed the full outline of her lovely breasts, moved with the soft ease of a tigress.

Instantly I recognized the wondrous features I had seen in the throneroom. It was she whose lovely head had graced the massive stone bowl, whose eternal history had been told by the Pharaoh, Atma, Princess of Egypt!

"You are surprized. Confess it now, you really are surprized."

I had risen at the entrance of Hatshepsut's lovely daughter.

"Surprized!" I gasped, smilingly. "I—I am amazed."

The beauty laughed gayly, and seating herself on a plush-covered bench, crossed shapely legs as her dark eyes smiled into mine.

"But you need not remain standing." Her manicured hand motioned to a chair.

"Is it not the proper thing to do?" I had asked.

"We can dispense with formalities. Just be your natural self—I know I will enjoy it."

"In that case, you will find me curious."

"Curious? And why that?"

Seated on a chair, I looked long and earnestly at the superb creature before me. Last night I had gazed at those same exquisite features when it was only a head that had spoken and watched me. And now there sat an enchantress whose body would have put to shame the form of a Salome.

"Princess Atma, there is one—there are two things I would like very much to know. I wonder if it would seem rude for me to ask them."

The wondrous smile deepened.

"And what are these so vitally important questions?" she parried.

Hopefully I continued.

"What has become of my companions, and where are they now? It is only right I should know. We were dragged into this horrible business together, but I feel responsible for them. Also, how is it that I see you as you now are, when last night it was only a——" I paused, uncertain of my words. "Oh, you must know what I mean."

"Of course I do, and will readily answer your queries—at least one of them. Your friends are safe—that I promise you! I talked to them but a short while ago, and had their own assurance as to their welfare. It is needless to be alarmed or worried. Your other question must go unanswered for a short time. Later on, perhaps, when certain changes have been effected, you may be told."

"But it all seems so impossible."

"And best, perhaps, when not thought of. No," she continued as I would have remonstrated; "for the present you must be satisfied with what I have told you."

Her firm voice told the folly of insistence.

"The knowledge of my companions' safety is a pleasant one, and I thank you, Princess, for that consolation. As to the other—I await its answer with patience," and I smiled at my lovely visitor.

"It is well. You will know all in good time, I promise. But come, tell me of yourself, of your country—that great land I have so yearned to see."

There was a world of longing in her words, and the dark eyes looked searchingly at me, as though to find in my features the answer to her curiosity.

"I am afraid you would find it very disappointing. It is only its distance that lends enchantment. Black smoke, deafening noises and grimy high buildings would scarce make a pleasant change from the blue skies and peaceful quiet of your own lovely land."

The daughter of the ages shook her head in a cheerful negative.

"No, I would love it. The new lands, especially America, have fascinated me. I thrill at the stories of its cool, high mountains, its great cities and eager, reckless people. I have dreamed through the years of its gilded halls of pleasure, the exclusive clubs and racing autos, gigantic liners entering its harbors of a million lights. Tell me of these many wonders."

"Of course, if you wish it; yet it seems rather needless. So accurate is your description, it would appear as though you yourself had been there."

"Ah, those are only memories of what I have heard. No, I have not yet traveled to the new world, though the day is not distant when that dream will be realized."

And so for a long hour I told the Egyptian Princess of the new lands that lived and loved beyond the hot desert; of their struggles for supremacy, the many marvelous inventions of the recent years, as well as a brief outline of the leading figures that governed and worried a harassed people.

During my lengthy description Atma had stared at me in wide-eyed fascination. Plainly her heart had deserted the land of the pyramids.

"Oh, it is just as I knew it would be!" she exclaimed when I had ended. "Exactly like the countless books I have read and memorized through the waiting years."

"You read English as well as speak it?"

"I read and speak all languages. I learned them to help pass the dreary centuries. Alone, of all humans, I can decipher the two existing scrolls of the Uzusiki, the original picture language of the first yellow men who came from the moon, eight thousand years ago."

I MUST have looked the surprize I felt.

"Then it is true! It is really true—that wild unbelievable tale that was told to us in the throneroom!"

"The Prince of Egypt has not lied."

"But it's—it's unthinkable! You are so young—so very young; and yet it is said you have known the Pharaohs."

Again that bewitching smile.

"I have seen many of the famous people of history," she admitted. "Thothmes III, my own illustrious mother, as well as the wise historian priest, Manetho. The great Alexander has kissed my lips as he pledged his undying vows of love. No Arab ever thirsted for the sweet wells as I yearned for my release and the strong arms of Hannibal. Balkis too——"

"Balkis?"

"The Queen of Sheba," explained Atma. "Some five hundred years after our horrible imprisonment, whispers of Karamour's great knowledge and won-

derful oil reached her in distant Chitor, the city beyond the hot hills. Heading a long caravan that contained her famed treasures, the titian-haired ruler came to this great fortress, asking of the Prince the anointment of life eternal.

"Karamour at that time had not perfected his golden elixir to the point of enabling perpetual existence. The oil itself, while beneficial, could not grant immortality without the aid of certain unknown chemicals. He told his visitor that she must wait till further years of study had given him the required wisdom, but this did not please the Queen. Knowing that the oil would only preserve the features as they were at the time of its use, and fearing old age before the fluid would be ready, the Sabean, who did not like the thoughts of eternal life as an aged woman, and hearing that Karamour's secret prayers to Osiris would awaken from death's sleep all who died by the bitter drugs, drank of the fatal cup of Ecila. Thus, dying while still young, she could wait with content for the great hour, assured that when perfected, and having been called back and anointed with the golden oil, she would pass on down through the centuries while still in the appearance of youthful glamor."

"But the Queen of Sheba is still dead," I reminded.

"And always will be. Shortly after her demise, Prince Karamour perfected the right ingredient for the oil, as his experiment with Zena, the Queen's giant guard, so satisfactorily proved; though it was not till thirty centuries later that he achieved his supreme triumph. But as for raising the dead—it is only one of the many myths of the ancient world."

"And you?" I asked. "Are you to be young and beautiful through the ages to come?"

The royal Egyptian laughed gayly.

"Sacred cat of Bubastis!" she cried, "but you are inquisitive. But we will talk no more of the Old World's characters. Let their memories, like their bones, rest undisturbed. I would much rather hear you. Tell me of the many pleasures of your world. Ah, yes," she added quickly, "your dislikes—I would know of them."

"And you have said that I am inquisitive," I smiled.

"Curiosity," she laughed, "—a feminine trait that must always be forgiven."

"And so we find a Princess with a fault?"

"A Princess with many faults, perhaps; nor do I wish to correct them." The musical voice paused slightly, and then she added: "And could you guess my latest failing—one taught me by the Twentieth Century?"

"Not in a thousand years," I had answered.

"You wish to know?"

"With all my heart."

"Slang," she whispered in mock seriousness. "Those cute little words that are so short, yet hold a world of meaning."

"S-slang!" I gasped. "But where could you have possibly learned it?"

"From a very interesting teacher. Billy was an American sailor that deserted at Tangier. He had drifted down the coast and stumbled on this wayward place by chance. For two long years he was here, and never a day passed that we did not spend hours together. Chaktu! but he was a darling; a burning, impatient darling, with his blue eyes and soft fair hair. Oh, so gay, so careless and eager! Not like the boresome fools of this ancient place, who talk only of Egypt's lost glory and of people long dead. He lived only to love and laugh."

The eyes of Atma sparkled as she spoke.

"He fell wildly in love with me, and talked only of the future and our escape. Always he told what we should do when

I had become whole. For countless hours he amused me with his pleadings of love, and then in a gay mood he would dance and sing the most ridiculous songs till I was weary with laughter. Oh, you should have heard him," she insisted.

"And he has left?"

"None ever leaves this castle of death. Some spy must have overheard us and reported it to Karamour. I never knew, or bothered to ask. One day he disappeared —that was all."

The calmness with which she spoke the words horrified me.

"So you must not be shocked if I use the slang of your country."

"On the contrary, I would like it," I answered dryly, aware of a vague fear of this weird creature.

THE gray shades of eventide had now stolen across the sky. Already could be felt the first cool breeze that announced the quick coming of the tropical night. High above us in the spiral belfry, the evening bells were tolling the lonely hour of dusk.

My last answer had pleased the royal beauty, and she now leaned slightly toward me. Her curving body glowed with the flaming warmth of Africa. Her lovely face was temptingly close to mine. The fragrance of a delicate perfume was wafted toward me. A soft sigh escaped her perfect lips; and then, with a thrill that burned like dancing flames, her ivory fingers ran through my hair.

"I am going to like you," came the soft whisper. "I am going to like you very much, and you will quickly learn to care for me. We will have wonderful hours together—just you and I—wonderful, happy hours. I must leave you now, but carry your memory with me always. Karamour departs at sunrise for a three-day inspection of the desert tribes, taking his savage raiders with him. There will be but a few slaves left at the castle. Only some faithful servants whose tongues are ever silent—and ourselves!"

Her voice was eager, expectant.

"Tomorrow night, when the moon hangs low over the waters, I will have Zena bring you to the beach, where I will be waiting. Will you come?"

Like one entranced, I could but nod.

"I will instruct the slaves to allow you complete freedom, Mr. Bryant," came her clear voice, as she rose. "You will be at liberty to come and go from the gardens as you choose. Tonight Karamour will send for you, but have no fear. I have seen to your safety."

At the doorway the enchantress turned suddenly, in a reckless wide-eyed manner.

"Remember then," she whispered eagerly. "Tomorrow night on the beach —we meet—alone—just you and I. And when we do——" A snap of her fingers, the roll of her eyes, accompanied the next two sharply accented words:

"Oh, Baby!"

14. The Justice of Karamour

EARLY that evening I had taken my solitary watch upon the tiny balcony that gave a view of the lighted yacht in the harbor below. The one forlorn hope of freedom depended on my vigilance, but long before the appointed time set by the Russian as his hour of departure, the hideous Usanti had come to escort me once more to the throneroom.

In the great reception hall lolled some fifty Arab henchmen of the Pharaoh, grim and silent in the shadows of the pillars. But these richly robed men were all chieftains. Plainly, some important meeting could be expected. Their dark eyes watched my every move with an ominous silence.

The Princess Atma had told me that I might expect a summons to the throne-

room. Perhaps it would mean another lengthy oration by the bodiless Karamour. If so, I would doubtlessly meet my fellow prisoners. I longed to see Carol, to talk to her, to hear from her own lips that she was still unharmed.

Presently we were joined by the garrulous Zola. The sleek Frenchman, immaculate in white flannels, seemed in excellent spirits as he laughed and chatted with the guards and tribesmen. How I hated that cultured fiend!

At length his wandering gaze fell upon me, and with a loud exclamation of pleasure he strode quickly forward.

"Ah, *Monsieur,* but this is a surprize! A glorious treat for us undeserving mortals. As well as the leading sheiks and tribesmen, Monsieur Bryant honors us with his presence. He wishes to be a witness during the process of justice? Or can it be that he is a bit alarmed as to what fate might befall an accomplice of treachery?"

A disinterested yawn had no effect on the mock politeness.

"The brave *Monsieur* could hardly consider himself dealt with unfairly if a sentence of twenty lashes or the loss of one eye was inflicted on his own person. After all, his conduct on the *Star of Egypt* was hardly that which would cause his countrymen to cheer."

I looked squarely into the mocking face.

"Some day we are going to be alone," I told him softly. "Alone, where there will be no surrounding guards or swordsmen to put you at an advantage. We will then see if your conduct is such that it would cause cheers. Cheers, Doctor Zola—or will it be jeers?"

The booming crash of a giant gong cut short whatever retort he might have given. As though awaiting this deafening signal, the massive doors at the far end of the hall were suddenly flung open from within, and we were ushered into the great throneroom of Karamour.

On either side of the enormous chamber were long tiers of seats. Toward these we were motioned by the black doormen, to sit in a strained, silent suspense; and presently from a dark passageway beyond the throne, a tall figure emerged from the cavernous depths beneath the room.

As he came into the brilliant glare of the chandeliers, with a thrill of horror I recognized him. It was he—the dark cruel head that had talked from the great bowl—Karamour, the masterful Prince of Egypt!

Silently the inmates of the room stood at attention, while the athletic figure mounted the jewel-inlaid seat beneath the canopy.

"Followers of Karamour," he began, "you see before you the blood of the Oekheperkere, a survivor of that golden age that was Egypt's—the Eighteenth Dynasty. Surely the Gods in granting my rebirth have given sufficient proof that Osiris smiles on our plans of eternal supremacy for the earth's oldest civilization.

"This morning after the early sacrifices in the temple, as I stood on the high tower of Horus to greet the rising Ra, I was once more assured of the great cause. 'Destroy all others but the chosen,' whispered the desert winds. 'Slay if you must, but make Egypt supreme,' cooed a snow-white dove that descended from the blue. Surely this was the departed spirit of Den-Setual. And then, as I waited and thrilled at these heavenly omens, the flaming God himself wrote five golden words in the sky: 'For You An Eternal Kingdom.' "

The watching Arabs, impressed by the wild words, nodded in silent assent.

"Some six months ago you were summoned to this great fortress. At that time I knew the end of the great curse was at

hand, and awaited only the arrival of the pale people from the island to free me from the living dead. Now I have again become whole, and with that change comes also the hour to strike.

"Sheik Arbul Ben Kaden!"

A PORTLY Arab, his leathery skin blackened by many years under the hot Sahara sun, stepped forward.

"Your report of the north," demanded Karamour.

Sheik Arbul Ben Kaden bowed low.

"The words of the messengers have met with a response far beyond our wildest dreamings, oh great one," he answered solemnly. "The hot sands of Igidi swarm with impatient warriors awaiting your commands. Kufra desert lives but for you, while the ten thousand swords of near-by El-juf will be drawn only in the service of the oldest ruler."

The Pharaoh nodded approvingly.

"You have done well, loyal follower, and have earned an eternal resting-place in the Valley of the Kings. May the smile of Osiris be always with you. And you, Achmet Eldood?"

An old sheik came forward.

"From the far-off Lybian desert, to Tana's blue waters in distant Ethiopia, the stalwart sons of the old world would resume the rule of the Pharaoh."

"And the Sudan—the Anglo-Egyptian land of the ancients—what of that?"

"El-Obeid down to warm Uganda—yes. A protesting few to be slain at Omdurman; perhaps a feeble resistance at the Lado, and the white Nile is won. Inland to the lonely waters of Lake Chad, your voice is ever law."

Sheik Arbul Ben Kaden spoke again.

"Word has come to us from that sunny land across the water. Again it brings an urgent message from the one who lives only in the past and would restore the ancient glory of his country. He would join us."

"You mean——"

"Yes, oh master, the powerful——"

The Pharaoh gave a shudder of disgust.

"Dark pits of Jzual!" he exclaimed. "Well do I know the thoughts that ever possess his ambitious mind. It is no love of Egypt's lost grandeur, or of Karamour and his cause that prompts the decision. He would unite with us solely to gain that land which borders his own foreign possessions. Restore the ancient glory of his country, you say. Bah! Egypt had known fifty centuries of the Pharaohs while his land was still a wilderness. Nay, we have no need for such as he in the ranks of the chosen."

"And tomorrow, oh glorious one," spoke a stout chieftain. "We leave then?"

"At dawn," came the reply. "Far to the south, away from the spying eyes of the unbelievers, to a point already designated, we go to test the blue fluids sent us by the mad one of Moscow. A slight experiment has already given us great hopes, but we would test them more fully. If their powers indeed be as great as he would have us believe"—a sudden light of triumph leaped to the dark face, —"the world is ours!"

A hoarse yell rang out from the Arabs at the shouted words, and with one accord the curved swords of the swarthy horde were unsheathed and lifted high in barbaric salute.

Karamour had risen and was watching the cheering cutthroats with the wild eyes of a maniac, while the agile body shook with suppressed emotion. Presently the Pharaoh raised a hand for silence.

"Tomorrow, then, we ride south, but tonight our hearts must be made heavy with the dread that another of the chosen might have proven false. I have called you, therefore, to hear the plea of one

charged with that always unpardonable crime—treason!"

Karamour turned suddenly toward me.

"Stranger of the new world, I have given my pledge to the Princess Atma, who, influenced by some strange whim, has asked that you be granted clemency. Thus you are to be spared from a trial that might result in your death.

"Your conduct since imprisonment has been unworthy. Aboard the *Star of Egypt* a mutiny was incited by you. Your coming was not desired, and now you help to tempt one whose loyalty has long been waning. Twice have you been spared; do not tempt fate a third time. On my return from the desert I will have further words with you. Till then, though you are allowed liberty of the palace and surrounding gardens, I warn you to use discretion."

The thin lips tightened.

"Do not be deluded with this kindness as a lack of vigilance. For three hundred miles the sands are patrolled by my men. To escape means capture, and capture means death! Remember those words."

Four black guards had appeared in the doorway dragging a resisting figure roughly to the throne. A death-like pallor shone on the blood-smeared features of their victim, but it could not disguise my fellow plotter of the pits, Captain Barakoff.

The Pharaoh glared hard at the man before him.

"Dog," he growled, "it has been said that you are an unworthy follower. How answer you this charge?"

The Russian grinned in an agonized manner.

"I—I have done no wrong, master," he faltered.

"That I intend to find out—and quickly," came the grim reply. "You have been strong in your claim of innocence—let us now hear the words of your accusers.

"Doctor Zola!"

The Frenchman, ever ready to welcome attention, came forward from the rows of waiting Arabs.

"What say you against the loyalty of this man?" demanded the Pharaoh.

Etienne Zola bowed low before his inquirer.

"You will recall," he purred in his softest voice, "that I have always been suspicious of the prisoner. His bad record in the Czar's army, as well as his avarice—his love of money was well known on the west coast. Always desirous of protecting my Prince, I kept a careful watch, and not without result."

The physician produced a letter which he opened and held before him.

"Captain Barakoff," he continued, with a sneering look at the unhappy wretch, "wrote this letter, which I had intercepted, to his beloved in far-off Archangel. Its contents conclusively prove his treachery. I will read a——"

Karamour waved an impatient hand.

"Its wording is already known to me. What of the slaves' report?"

USANTI, now called, told of hearing Barakoff offer to free me for a certain sum. He admitted the amount had escaped him, but readily recalled the disrespectful manner in which the Russian had spoken of the Pharaoh, as well as his plan for halting the yacht while a boat would be rowed ashore to bring me aboard. Evidently the black had wondrously sharp ears, or else our voices in the quiet of the dungeon must have carried farther than we thought. All in all, it was a damning denunciation against one already doomed.

As Usanti ceased speaking, a brief silence fell on the grim assembly. All

eyes were turned upon the tall figure who stood before the Pharaoh.

"What do you say against the word of the slave?" asked Karamour at length.

"He lies, great Pharaoh! My heart was —and is—ever loyal to the cause," came the answer, in a weak, halting tone that plainly told his guilt.

"But the proof—what have you to show that would make me believe the slave's words to be false? Speak quickly; though your trial is just, it should be brief also. Haste—your proof against the charges."

"I did not plot with the captive, oh master. The sole purpose of my descent to the dungeons was to escort him to his former quarters, as you yourself had ordered. Believe me when I say my heart is ever true to the Pharaoh. In all the hosts of Karamour, there is none more loyal than Alexis Barakoff. Ask the captive—ask Bryant; he will tell you——" and the man's eyes turned appealingly toward me for a confirmation of his lie.

Karamour leaned forward like a striking serpent.

"Usanti's words," he hissed.

"But lies, only lies!" cried the Russian. "He has fiendishly condemned me to raise himself in your favor; he would lie to kill your faithful followers and surround the court with slinking parasites. I have said or done no wrong, and well he knows it. He is but a miserable deformed wretch who has always hated me and seeks my ruin."

"Might he not have a just cause for such enmity?" asked Zola.

"Just cause—no. He entered my quarters once and I punished him for it. He has never forgiven me."

Was the wily Barakoff to win his way to freedom?

"Treason is a grave offense," the Frenchman reminded him.

"I have always thought it so."

"You persist then in your denial?"

"I persist in denying an untruth."

"None other has ever accused the black of untruths."

"None other has ever accused me."

"But the letter, my captain," Zola put in quickly. "Would you say Usanti wrote that also?"

Again that hesitant, condemning gulp.

"I—I do not know."

"A lie! a lie that comes from the depths of your black heart!" thundered Karamour. "Oh miserable creature, you have betrayed the trust of your ruler; broken your vows to the great cause. The countless centuries of love and reverence that would have kept your name sacred have been forgotten in that greed for gold. There is but one sentence for such treachery; but one punishment befitting that ever unpardonable crime:

"The Pit!"

A scream of terror rang out from the doomed man as the judgment was pronounced.

With a quickness that told of long practise, the dread sentence was now carried out. In the center of the great floor an iron ring had been securely fastened. A stout chain was now run through the ring, and with three blacks tugging hard on the iron links, a portion of the floor was slowly raised to disclose a cunningly concealed pit some six feet square.

A nauseating odor arose from the dark interior, a damp, smothering smell, made more terrible by the loud, blood-tingling squeals that accompanied it—sharp, angry barks that brought a sickly pallor to the sun-tanned faces of the Arabs, while the black guards cast nervous glances at their ruler. With one accord the entire assembly moved forward to that awful hole of death.

Rats! Huge, dirty, horrible rats! Bounding, famished creatures of an enormous size that brought a shudder from the watchers, leaped and snarled in that terrible pit. The slippery sides of the ten-foot depth prevented them from emerging, though the rodents were constantly attempting the hopeless climb. Sharpened spikes had been driven into the bottom rocks, while the brilliant lights above plainly showed the twinkling eyes, the red maws and sharp teeth of the rolling brown mass. This then was the dread pit so feared by the inmates of the castle.

The sneering Zola could not resist the temptation of a final taunt at the condemned man, who, now stripped of all garments and with naked arms lashed firmly to his sides, stood looking in wild-eyed terror into the pit into which he would so soon be plunged.

"Three hundred of them, Captain! Three hundred with sharp teeth and no food for two days! You will find them appreciative of your company," the fiend laughed.

Of all the heartless gathering, the physician alone seemed unperturbed. White-robed Arabs, wide-eyed and nervous, looked silently on. The four black jailers were visibly affected by the awful din. Even the Pharaoh was somber and serious as he silently motioned the slaves to continue.

A long chain was now firmly attached to the legs of the Russian, who, despite his pleadings, was swung head foremost and quickly lowered into the pit.

At the appearance of the nude body, the snarls increased to a deafening roar. Squealing rats, now standing upright in anticipation, awaited the gleaming flesh. And even as I closed my eyes to turn from the horrible scene, the screaming victim was hurried to his awful destruction.

15. The Enchantress of Sin

THE swarthy hordes of Karamour left at dawn. As the sun rose, I stood on the balcony watching the Arabs mount their splendid beasts and form a long line behind a white horse held by a waiting black.

There was no shouting or carefree laughter now. All mirth and revelry had been replaced by tightening jaws and determined faces that well showed the desperate ride expected by these desert nomads. Wordless, they held the eager steeds and awaited their leader. The lonely waste of water in the west formed a sparkling background.

While I watched the mounted horde with wondering silence, a tall figure strode from the gardens to the waiting horse. It was Karamour.

As the lithe body swung into the saddle, his gaze fell full upon me. Instantly the dark face lighted.

"Remember well my warning of last night, oh stranger," he shouted. "To escape means capture, and capture means certain death!"

Then, with a wild whoop and a command to the Arabs, the last of the Pharaohs set spurs to his horse and dashed over the sand dunes to the south, while behind him, their long white robes fluttering in the morning winds, came his savage band of cutthroat followers.

As the last of the Arabs rode into the distant blue, a peal of feminine laughter rang from the towering turrets, a long-drawn-out laugh of scornful derision that was followed by a foul oath.

Late that afternoon I had put my newly proclaimed liberty to use, and descending the great stairs, casually passed the two guards at the terrace door to saunter out into the gardens beyond.

I wandered through the delightful fairyland that had been transplanted to

the sandy wastes of the African coast, admiring the stately trees, the elaborate carvings on the benches and spraying fountains, as well as the brilliantly plumed birds that graced the well-kept sward. Soft music from the radio in the rustic summer house at the cliff's edge but lent an added enchantment to the surroundings. The gardens of Karamour combined the luxuries of the new world with the splendor and beauty of the old.

THAT night, under the rays of the tropical moon and a million blazing stars, I was guided by Zena to the winding steps that led from the gardens of Karamour to the sandy beach below. There, standing in the shadows of a graceful palm, with the lighted castle on the diffs above, I awaited the lovely Atma.

For a long hour I had kept my lonely watch, expecting momentarily the appearance of the Princess on the steps above, when my attention was drawn to a pearl-white figure that swam through the waters far to the left. With steady, superb strokes, the swimmer cut through the silvery surf, to emerge, wet and dripping, a tall, shapely girl, whose nude body shone like ivory in the moonlight.

"Atma!"

Standing on the wet sands, the cool winds caressing her, the lovely face turned dreamily toward the stars, stood the glamorous daughter of the ages, a dark-eyed Princess from the mists of time, whose tiny feet had trod the great halls of the Pharaohs.

Ah, the weird beauty of that moment! Even now its memory comes to haunt me—a picture from the past; a vision that might well have been the lonely Eve by some desolate sea at the earliest dawn of history. High overhead from the summer house near the cliff's edge, came strains of soft music; dreamy, melodious airs, artistry of today. But the glorious figure that swayed in the starlight had danced and strained her lithe body to the crashing of mighty timbrels, thirty-four hundred years ago!

Slowly the royal Egyptian made her way up the beach, stopping only to don the waiting garments that lay on a sand dune near the surf. Then in the scanty attire of long ago—golden breast-plates, filmy four-slit skirt and cobra-ensigned head-band—the girl came unhesitatingly toward me, her features wreathed in a bewitching smile.

"I swam far out to sea," came the musical voice. "Oh, it was such a long, long way! No sound could reach me from the distant shore, the low sand dunes had disappeared. Even the lighted castle seemed small and distant. I was alone in a vast world of silence. Ah, it was wonderful, lying out there in the dark waters, to be rocked by the rolling waves. For an hour I drifted and dreamed in the starlight. Once a great ocean liner, a sparkling mass of golden lights, passed far to the east, but they did not hear the lonely cry of Atma. Perhaps I might have forgotten the world and swum on thus for ever, had I not known the young American would be waiting for me."

Together we sat on the dark cloak the Princess had left in the sand.

"And now you are tired after that long swim."

Atma had sat in a posture of ease beside me, so close that I could feel the warmth of her half-naked body. At my question she drew back where she could better see my face.

"Tired?" she repeated, and then she laughed. "You think a little swim would tire me?"

I smiled at her apparent surprize.

"Then am I to believe it has not?"

"It could never tire me—physical exertion seldom does. Why, once when I

was a little girl and the royal troops of Egypt beat back the Hyksos beyond Thaubasium, I danced the steps of victory from sunset till dawn in the great halls of the Moon Goddess. Nay, if I am to tire, the cause must be other than weary muscles."

"Mental boredom, perhaps?"

The girl shrugged her graceful shoulders.

"It is possible," she admitted. "But no, no—it is not that. I am weary of this castle, of this country. I dread that constant talks of Egypt's lost glory—of the many gods and their terrible anger at our wrong doings—of anything connected with antiquity. I am tired of—of him!" she whispered.

Her eyes looked at me in a strange, beseeching manner.

"Surely you will understand," she went on in an earnest tone. "I wish to be free, to be away from all this. The old world no longer appeals to me; I would know of the new, to see the many things the eager Billy told me—spacious dwellings—evenings at the lighted theatres in wraps of ermine—graceful dancing in a polished ballroom. Ah, it is what my heart calls for—it is what I should have."

Her beautiful face was close to mine, waiting, I knew, for a confirmation of her words.

"But is that not impossible?" I protested. "A daughter of the Pharaohs to——"

"Oh damn the Pharaohs!" cried the Princess of Egypt hotly. "Must I always hear that loathsome word? Am I to stay for countless years in these ancient halls, hearing only the chanting of Egypt's lost glory? It is the new lands I want—their delicious thrills—their pleasures!

"Do you not know the awful centuries I spent imprisoned on that great bowl of stone—the ages that passed while I was but the living dead? Can you realize what the torture of three hundred years would mean to one who could but hope and yearn once more for the joys and loves of her maidenhood? No, no, you could never know. You are a man of the cold Twentieth Century, to whom the pulsing warmth of the eternal passion must for ever remain a mystery.

"But I, who have thirsted through the ages, know its fires, and am free once more for that glorious ecstasy." She added after a slight pause: "Free to laugh and live as of yore. Free to enjoy the many pleasures so long denied me. Free to care, to—to love."

Her voice sank to a low whisper.

ATMA was looking at me in an eager, expectant manner. One slender arm had encircled mine, and her supple body leaned closer. Parted red lips were near my own. A wild rush of madness swept over me. Pulses pounding, heart thumping, I yearned to cover that perfect mouth with smothering kisses till she would lie helpless, panting in my arms.

We were alone! We were alone! Dazed with the fragrance of her hair, I could feel her loveliness tremble with desire as her lips brushed mine. It was as though this one moment had been snatched from all eternity, to carry us a billion miles beyond the planets and the suns. Only with the greatest effort could I draw away.

"But Karamour—he will never consent to your leaving here. This—this is madness! He would not forsake the land of his father, nor would you leave without him."

"Why do you say that?" she cried. "He means nothing to me—never has. I have always felt a strong dislike for the loveless fool who thinks only of the past and Egypt's forgotten grandeur. Nay, I have planned my flight too long to let anything

prevent it, and never was the time so ripe as now. Listen:

"Karamour has ridden into the desert to test liquids—some wild dream of a crazed scientist, that he thinks will render useless the man-power of other nations. I, of course, know that it is but a hopeless dream. The great guns of the new countries will quickly crush both him and his feeble power; yet we must let the fool find that out for himself.

"But you and I—why should we stay here to perish miserably with the rest? Is it not wiser to flee these ancient halls and spend the years in the pleasures of the new worlds, than lie as whitened skeletons amid the charred castle ruin?"

"And my friends—you could arrange to have them come with us?" I asked quickly.

Atma hesitated a moment before replying.

"Yes, we can do that," she answered finally. "Leave with them when the plane returns the day after tomorrow. Of course, the tiny ship will make two trips necessary, but as it is only some nine hours' journey from here to Tangier, it could be done."

An escape! An escape, and return to the lands we loved and knew! But this royal daughter of the Nile—did she realize the strangeness of the new world? Could she know and understand the countless changes that had taken place since her tiny feet trod the flower-strewn halls of old Memphis?

"Wait," I cautioned. "You are going to find the new world strange in more ways than one. True, it has all the luxuries of which you speak, as well as many more. Each, however, demands its price. Money is as essential to the modern land as an unerring sword arm was to the old."

Atma laughed softly.

"The answer to all that lies but a short distance in the desert," she murmured, "and it is ours for the taking. Tomorrow night, while the castle sleeps, we will take three blacks and ride to the east, where, in the eternal halls of night that lie below a forgotten valley, we can soon load ourselves with unthinkable riches."

As the girl ceased speaking, a soft melody from the cliffs above caused her to turn quickly. The radio in the summer house that had been playing soft, unknown music, suddenly began a melody I knew well, a lovely, tantalizing air, that seemed to breathe the glamor of old Egypt—the weirdly throbbing *Vision of Salome.*

As the first dreamy notes reached us, an eager thrill ran through the supple body of the Egyptian. Now, with the ease of an uncoiling serpent, she rose to her lovely height. Only for an instant did she pause to smile at me, wide-eyed and glorious; and then, with a slow, exotic grace, the long-limbed Princess began the dance of the centuries.

It was fascinating. Soft, rolling muscles played beneath the ivory surface. A perfect body swayed enchantingly. Slender arms encircled the shapely head, while the beautiful face, beaming through a mass of wavy black hair, seemed lost in wondrous dreaming.

As though in rhythm with the dancer swayed the tropical palms. The sparkling ocean seemed motionless and quiet. A mellow moon hung low; while high above, the blazing stars flashed their light to illuminate dimly the beauty of that whirling siren.

I watched as one entranced. For me, at least, time had ceased to exist, and I had been drawn back across the void to behold a swaying vision that had enslaved the hearts of men ages upon ages before the dancing Salome roused the passions of King Herod. Weird music, that strange, exotic ringing—was that the crashing of ancient timbrels from the

rolling fogs of time? High overhead among the stars, those hazy shimmering outlines — were they the disapproving frowns of Pharaohs from the dawning? And surely my wonderment was seen by the Egyptian, for high above the blaring blasts her silvery laugh came to me.

Higher rose the quickening music. Wilder, faster became the dancing. The flashing breast-plates—the fluttering garments! Her tiny feet seemed scarcely to touch the sand; the flying body was but a whirling ivory mass. And then the barbaric air rose up as a great roar, to stop with a crash that sent the dancer hurling herself with complete abandon into my outstretched arms.

I drew the yielding body quickly to me.

"You are glorious," I groaned, "so maddeningly glorious!" And raising that perfect head, I kissed the red lips of the most beautiful creature this world has ever known.

"Kiss me! Oh kiss and love me!" she whispered. "My veins flow not with the ice of the girls of your world, but a desiring thirst that grows more burning with each passing second!"

Her white arms pressed me closer.

"Kiss me! Crush me, stronger, tighter, till I die within your arms! This moment of bliss must never end—we will make its joys eternal. Again! Again!" she murmured. "Oh eleven sinful gods, again! We are alone, beloved, we are alone! The stars for ever hold all secrets. The sleeping world is far and distant. My eager heart cries wildly for you—and the night is long."

16. Sheba's Treasure

THE following night I rode far into the desert with the Princess of Egypt in search of the fabulous wealth of which she had spoken.

I was now hopelessly in love with the beautiful Atma, madly obsessed with a passion that obliterated all else but her charm. The amorous moments in those perfect arms had erased all memories of Carol, or any responsibilities I should have felt for the imprisoned Terrys.

I no longer planned escape, either for myself or for my friends. Ambition, like reason, had gone. Gone also was the long-planned retribution. The caresses of the dark-eyed siren had taken both manhood and will-power, to leave but a characterless weakling, who would lie, steal—or if need be, kill—but to bask in the glamor of her love.

Only vaguely had I been told our destination, and now as I swung to my saddle in the dimly lit courtyard, I observed among the three mounted blacks designated as our followers, the hideous dwarf, Usanti.

The keen eyes of the treacherous imp roved incessantly, as though fearful that some sign or move might escape him.

I leaned toward Atma, who, dressed in riding-breeches and open-necked shirt, with a heavy automatic pistol strapped around her slender waist, sat carelessly on her horse beside me.

"That black—the short one. It was he who betrayed Barakoff to the Pharaoh," I whispered. "Do you think it wise to take him with us?"

An expression of merciless cunning crossed the beautiful face as a long-lashed eye winked slyly at me.

"Of all the palace guards, these three alone I trust not. The hidden vaults of treasure must for ever remain a secret"—her lips smiled slightly—"that is why they ride with me this night."

As she finished the strange words, the Princess of Egypt brought her sharp whip down on the horse's haunches and dashed out into the night, while I and the three horsemen followed behind as best we could.

For two miles we rode sharply to the east in a lonely waste of sand into which the horses sank fetlock-deep at nearly every step. The barren, uneven country was cut into numerous ravines, lumpy stretches and shrubless little hillocks that showed dreary and foreboding in the moonlight. A hard wind had enveloped us, sending the tiny grains of sharp sand to cut our lips and faces, while the horses blinked and whinnied in helpless misery. Yet, with the persistence that the thought of riches will always inspire, we plodded patiently on behind the sprightly steed of our dauntless leader.

On reaching a cluster of palm-trees, Atma turned northward. The country became wilder as we advanced. Distant mountains showed on the far horizon, and from out of the blackness would come the cries of prowling desert creatures.

Silently we continued over the desolate wastes, once to pause at a tiny oasis, and several times to seek brief respite from the blowing sand in one of the numerous ravines. At length, after three hours of steady travel, we entered a deep valley from which many boulder-strewn gorges diverged. Here Atma halted her splendid beast and beckoned me closer.

"The second pass to the left!" she cried. "It is the one we seek. I have too often heard its description to be wrong. We will dismount here and tether our horses to these trees. Instruct Usanti to bring the long rope he carries—we shall need it in our climb. The boulder is a high one and the ascent to its summit hard and dangerous."

Stopping only to tie the weary horses, we presently entered a narrow gorge which led to the left from the valley. Here lay a narrow passage. On either side the black cliffs shot upward to the stars. Sneaking forms of prowling jackals slunk through the darkness. Stunted trees stood as lonely sentinels, while numerous large boulders, white and gleaming, were strewn on the bed of what in prehistoric times had been a mighty river.

Standing somewhat apart from the other rocks was a huge granite boulder. Toward this we were now led. There, in the shadow of its frowning height, Atma turned to face us. We had reached our destination.

THE dark-eyed Princess looked long at her travel-stained followers.

"We are about," she began, addressing the three wondering blacks, "to descend deep into the earth, far down near the pits of hell, through ancient corridors built by men whose bones have long since turned to dust."

Standing in the moon rays that flooded the rocky pass, a slender riding-whip slapping her open palm, with an amused smile the Egyptian watched the rolling eyes of the blacks.

"You will come, Usanti?"

The dwarf stared at her in silent misery.

"You mangy dog!" she snapped. "What is there to fear? What crazy superstition holds you back from the riches that lie within?"

"The spirits of the departed, oh mistress," whispered one. "They will be waiting to tear us asunder. They will choke us with their ghastly breath, and feed our bodies to the crawling things that lie in the gloom of the deep pits. Always have we heard of the terrible anger of the tomb gods."

"You miserable fool!" cried Atma. "The dead are dead; they can neither help nor harm you. Their powers have long vanished, nor are there any spirits or ghosts to avenge them. It is all lies—the stories you may have heard about the angry gods who will destroy the desecra-

tor of ancient tombs. All myths—only lies and myths." The silvery voice rose higher. "But the pit of Karamour is no myth, nor does Atma lie when she says your lashed bodies will be lowered to the hungry inmates of its bottom if you fail your Princess!"

The blacks shifted nervously but said no words, while I could but look in amazement at the fearless beauty who spoke so scornfully of the gods and legends she had been reared to respect and fear.

"But this hidden tomb of which you speak," I asked. "Where is it, and whose sarcophagus lies within?"

The girl pointed upward.

"A most unusual place for a most unusual ruler," she replied. "Lying on the summit of this great boulder is a flat rock that, once removed, will reveal an opening within. Descending, we will follow a long corridor to a gilded door, behind which lie the riches and preserved body of Balkis, Queen of Sheba!"

This, then, was where the famed treasure of antiquity lay hidden; the fabulous wealth that for thirty centuries, in legend and in song, had lured adventurous spirits from the far-off corners of the earth, and caused the hot sands to be littered with their bleaching bones.

"Out here, so far from her homeland?"

Atma nodded.

"Awaiting her restoration, as promised by Karamour. Awaiting that which can never be. But come—time passes. We must ascend the boulder."

There was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm among the blacks, but finally a tall, muscular fellow hesitantly volunteered the climb, and after several attempts, succeeded in reaching the summit. Once there, he threw down an end of the long rope he had carried, and by means of this crude ladder we at last stood on the high peak.

Now the flat rock was dislodged to show a gaping pit beneath. Again we adhered to the slender rope, and leaving a sentinel to guard the summit, with flaming torches the four intruders stood in the age-old corridors of Balkis. Holding high the feeble lights we groped our way through the blackness. Down a long hall that had been hewn in the living rock, a mighty passageway untrodden for over thirty centuries, we slowly advanced, and the grotesque carvings that showed in the gloom appeared as the angry eyes of the departed.

To think that within these winding halls had once been carried the body of her who had borne a child to Solomon; that the long-dead hands which had hewn this forgotten vault might have been raised in salute to David. Twice we passed the silent blackness of intersecting corridors, and once stepped carefully over the grisly remains of a faithful guard, beside whose moldering body lay a sword that could well have been the one called for by the great Jewish King in his judgment of the two sorrowing mothers and the child. Along the rocky floor were deep deposits of dust, an indication that the passage had long been unused. The granite sides converged as they rose to the top of the shaft some ten feet above us. Securely hidden in the very bowels of the earth below that lonely valley, the silent corridors had escaped the ravages of countless treasure-hunters as well as the many tomb-robbers of antiquity. The great Queen had been most cautious in selecting the vault for her riches. Atma had told how, at Karamour's orders, the slaves who had hewn the pass were slain by soldiers, who, in a like manner, were also slaughtered that none might know the resting-place of Sheba.

For a long half-hour we continued our dismal way. The winding passage had now straightened to a run in a direct line. Suddenly the flickering torchlight shone on a great yellowish mass.

The beauteous white face of Atma turned toward me.

"The great image of Thoat!" she cried. "Surely we have at last reached the vault of riches!"

Before a great doorway stood a huge, grotesque idol of a bird-headed god. In one massive claw it held a stone scroll that bore many hieroglyphics. The richly painted surface of the grim deity flashed yellow and red in the torchlight.

The two terrorized blacks, since making their reluctant entry to the gloomy corridor, had huddled closely together. Great beads of perspiration were standing on their brows, and now, at the sight of this grim omen, they trembled as though suddenly afflicted with ague.

"The God of the Ancients!" whispered the dwarf. "The terrible god with the bird-head who will presently awake and tear us to pieces with his sharp beak and claws. We are doomed! We are twice horribly doomed, as our spirits will be for ever compelled to sail the endless sea of fire that has been allotted as punishment for those who enter the vaults of their ancestors."

The girl but smiled at the words, and wresting the light from the terrorized Usanti, she held the torch high to look long at the ancient inscription before her.

"It's only one of those meaningless warnings," she laughed at length in a careless manner. "A warning and praise of Sheba's glory. The usual custom of the ancients. It reads:

"The Queen is not dead. She can never die. She has become as one who rises like the morning sun from the eastern horizon. She now rests from life like the setting sun in the west. Yet always shall she return. Again on some far distant day will she dawn anew in the east. She cannot die. She must not die. She is the sun. She is the burning glory of life. She lives for ever. The Queen has but flown. She has been taken up to the skies by Ra. The stairs of the heavens have been lowered that she may ascend thereon to the blue. To the sky. To the sky. To the great jeweled throne in the clearness has she gone. Sail on, oh beauteous one, in thy barge of the sun. Sail on till you return like a flaming ruby to your earthly realm. Yet even as thou hast departed, oh Queen, let thy earthly shell retain and use its terrible powers to blast with loathsome disease and frightful death all those who would enter to disturb thy earthly slumbers, or touch with vandal hands one glittering jewel."

As Atma ceased speaking, the hideous Usanti fell to his knees with a shriek that rang out through that dismal hall of silence.

Like a tigress the Princess of Egypt turned on the offending black.

"Silence!" she hissed, as one hand flew to her leather holster in a suggestive manner. "Silence, you fool, or you will feel my own way of blasting frightful death!"

The terrorized dwarf gulped loudly as though choked by unseen hands. A weak sigh escaped the trembling lips, but with an effort he rose on his frail legs, to look piteously at his mistress.

Pausing but to encircle the great image, the tireless Atma motioned us to follow, and going to the ancient door pushed back the massive creaking barrier, while behind her, three wide-eyed men looked in speechless wonderment at the scene before them.

A low moaning sound; a soft musical wailing that might have been a murmur from the ages, floated from the silent

chamber. But it was not that alone which held us spellbound. Lying along the walls and down the length of the long floor, from beneath the grayish mass of dust and cobwebs, there glowed and sparkled in the torchlight the scintillating brilliance of the world's greatest treasure.

On either side of the high room, large piles of golden ingots rose to the ceiling. As though hastily stowed, the precious metal lay in careless mounds. In many places great tablets of gold had been set in the solid masonry of the floor. An exquisite urn showed a thousand pearls of priceless beauty, while the three large chests in the center of the room flashed with the radiance of diamonds, emeralds and other precious stones.

At the far end of the great vault four stone steps led up to a tiny room of black marble. There, on a rising stone slab of exquisite carving lay a jewel-encrusted sarcophagus. An atmosphere of mournful silence prevailed in that ancient tomb of riches.

Slowly I turned to Atma.

"It's wonderful!" I whispered in an awed tone. "It's—it's too wonderful!"

The girl nodded.

"And securely hidden, too," she added. "I doubt not that thirty centuries more could pass and its great wealth would still lie undisturbed."

"Who else knows of its location?"

"Only Karamour, and he would not dare enter these halls of eternal night. Even the bravest of the ancients trembled at the vengeance of the gods to a desecrator of a tomb. But come, let us look upon Balkis."

With a warning of instant death to the blacks if they dared to touch the jewel chests, the Princess of Egypt made her way through the piles of riches to the small room where rested the famed Queen of antiquity.

Within the open sarcophagus lay a richly appareled woman of striking beauty. So fresh, so natural was her appearance, it seemed as if she were but sleeping. The eyes, half open, were turned toward us. Two bejeweled hands lay crossed on her large pearl breastplates. The lovely thick hair, combed in a strange yet becoming manner, lay in a waving mass on the dark olive skin of her neck and arms. The faintest flush seemed to have mounted her cheeks, while the half-opened lids were curled in a sad half-smile.

"Sheba!" I gasped. "Sheba, the beloved of Solomon!"

"The large ring that encircles her thumb—a parting gift from the Jewish King. It was once worn by Abraham."

"How do you know that?"

"She told me of it long ago," answered Atma. "Poor Balkis! It is better, perhaps, that she continues her long sleep. Great would be her anguish to arise and find that her country, once so rich and powerful, has dwindled to a comparatively weak and defenseless nation."

The strain of the subterranean tomb had told on the blacks. Now, with nerves completely broken, they begged their Princess the privilege of returning to the outer world.

The girl looked at the two kneeling men in scornful silence. Suddenly she turned to me, fearless and beautiful in the torchlight.

"Their courage has snapped," came her firm voice. "In a few minutes they will be gibbering idiots. But we must not let that deter us. For riches we came, and with riches we shall leave. All the rattling bones of eternity will not stop me! Hold the light above those jewel chests, while I select the most precious stones. The gold is far too heavy for us to han-

dle, though we may have need of it later."

From the deep pockets of her riding-breeches the daughter of Hatshepsut produced a small leather pouch, and standing above the chests, filled the bag with priceless stones, scrutinizing each chosen gem carefully. Again and again her long fingers ran through the sparkling mass.

"I cannot understand it," she said at length, when her tireless hands had at last ceased their searching. "The great emerald of Saul, the most priceless gem in all the world, is missing."

"Thieves, perhaps?"

"No, no," she cried, "it cannot be that. None other has entered this vault—and yet the stone is gone. A curse to the damned! The one gem I——" A wild smile leaped to her face.

"Yes, of course! That's where it is."

With a quick leap the girl was beside the sarcophagus.

"Hold the torch high," she cried. "It's here! Yes, it's here in her mouth!" and her eager hands shook the long-dead body.

"Stop!" I shouted, fearful of some great profanation.

The dark eyes looked their surprize.

"What are you going to do?" I stepped quickly toward the girl.

"Get the jewel, of course."

"But—but you can't do that! God! Are you entirely shameless? To desecrate the body of a good Queen long dead—you can't! It's—it's horrible!"

The daughter of Hatshepsut gave a shudder of disgust.

"Don't be a fool!" she snapped. "It can make no difference to her what I do. The jewel is there; I intend to have it. Let that suffice."

And with a carefree laugh, the Princess opened the long-closed mouth of Solomon's beloved to extract an enormous emerald that flashed and sparkled in the torchlight.

Sickened with horror, I watched the calm Atma leisurely inspect the glittering bauble and then drop it into the leather pouch at her side.

"And now we may leave," she consented. "The hour is late, with many weary miles of travel."

Quickly we passed from that gloomy tomb of riches. Atma herself closed the great wooden barrier; and then we intruders from the outside world made once more for the distant boulder summit.

We had left the dreary corridors far behind, and were emerging from the rocky gorge to the valley beyond. The cool night wind brushed the musty dust of the ages from our garments and filled our nostrils with its sweetness. The three blacks were walking happily before us in silent rejoicing at their release from the ghostly halls. A tropical moon had flooded the pass, and in its clear rays I followed the jewel-laden Atma. All seemed calm in this quiet vale; death and terror should have been left in the deep pits beyond. Yet, despite the horrid scene I had witnessed within the tomb, the greatest tragedy was still to be enacted.

Suddenly the girl drew the heavy Mauser pistol from its holster and began firing. Six times the dark gun flamed red, and with unerring aim, two bullets sped into each of the black slaves.

Running forward as she slipped a fresh clip of shells into the pistol, and standing above the groaning, blood-stained men, the Princess of Egypt sent shot after shot into the torn, helpless bodies.

And as silence came once more to the lonely valley, "It was the only way," she murmured softly; "the only way to keep for ever a secret the hidden treasure of Sheba."

The amazing weird denouement of this story will be told in the fascinating chapters that bring the tale to an end in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES. Reserve your copy at your magazine-dealer's now.

The Ocean Ogre

By DANA CARROLL

A tale of the sea, and the thing called Alain Gervais that came aboard the Jolly Waterman

JUNE 2.—Our stiff canvas, faded and gray, hangs lifeless from the yard-arms. We are stilled in one of the great calms. There is slowly rising water in the well, and our food is nearly gone. We heave on the greasy, heavy water, foul and green. The fog hides all from view. I confess that I am afraid. What an expressive word is despair! Luckily a flying-fish came scudding over the rails this morning.

June 3.—The fog has lifted a bit, but there is no relief in sight. The seven of us worked all last night on the pipes, until our backs ached and our hands were raw. The crew seems gruff and surly, but I haven't the heart to assert my authority at a time like this. They don't realize how near death they are. I write for record only, for who knows what may happen in the next few days? We are at present in the open sea a thousand miles from land. A fine situation for the skipper of the *Jolly Waterman!* Three months ago I had a full crew and a lucky boat, but now—scurvy isn't pleasant. No, sir, not pleasant at all.

June 4.—Hope! I have given up even entertaining the word. By working desperately we are able to keep the water in the well down, but our hardtack is nearly gone. We have pumped and sweated on empty stomachs for twelve hours. Losier collapsed. He folded like the others, but thank God he died quietly. No reproachful blasphemies heaped on my head. Just a tired fading, glad it was all over.

June 5.—It was funny. Another flying-fish came aboard today, and Herbie Tastrum made a dive for it. He looked like a maniac as he slid along the deck, filling his belly with splinters. He caught it between his two hands and bit into it, and finally disposed of it, bones and all. I was a bit put out. He could have divided it. I could shred a donkey's carcass in my present state. Yet, I write it was funny.

June 6.—Our case is desperate. No two ways about it, something has to happen, and soon. There isn't a breath of air stirring, and Hanson is below, unable to raise a limb. The five of us are able to keep the water down, but we are tired—dog-tired.

June 7.—We have one thing to be thankful for, the water hasn't risen much in the last twelve hours. Not that we would pump it out if it did. We are too tired to pump. We lie on the decks and curse, and make faces at the sky. I lost my temper many times today, but I am suffering acutely. Why do I continue to write futilely in this log book which no one will ever read?

June 8.—We are saved! What glorious good luck! A boatload of provisions and a jolly companion to cheer us up. He says he is the sole survivor of the *King William.* You have probably heard of the *King.* A finer brig never put out from Marseilles. A hurricane and a leak did for her. Six or seven pulled away in the longboat, but my friend (what else could you call your savior?) threw them overboard. They died first, of course. They

died from fright, or from drinking salt water. My friend didn't elaborate on details, but not liking the unsociable company of corpses, he naturally disposed of them. That's his story, and I accepted it at its face value. I am not a man to go poking about and asking questions. It's enough that he brought us a boatload of provisions and his own buoying companionship. He has actually injected spirit. We were growing to loathe each other, we five. He calls himself Alain Gervais.

June 11.—Gervais (he insisted we call him that) has been with us now for three days. He has the run of the ship, and I have turned the mate's cabin over to him. The mate has no further need for a cabin—he spends his nights rolling on the ocean floor. Gervais is tall and emaciated. His face is oyster-colored, drawn and haggard. His eyes are set deeply in dark caverns and actually seem to consume you. There is something devastating about those eyes; sometimes they seem a hundred years old. His forehead is high and as yellow and dry as parchment, and his nose is shaped like a simitar. With long, gangling arms and thick wrists he presents an awesome picture. A very peculiar fellow now that I get to know him better. But he is one of us.

JUNE 12.—Gervais has kept more to himself. He remained locked in his cabin all morning, and answered my anxious questions curtly, through the closed door. But I was too busy to investigate; there is a chill in the air that encourages hope for a wind in the near future. Some of the crew seem too tired to work. They came across a bottle of rum in Losier's locker, and by mixing it with salt water they concocted an elixir to alleviate their suffering. Who am I to assert my authority, but I hope for the first breeze, as it will surely bolster the ship's morale. At that time I plan to regain my old power of discipline.

June 13.—A breeze is surely coming. It is eerily still, all around us, except for a sharp report every now and then, as another deck plank snaps under the direct rays of a broiling sun. I am working frantically on a miserable substitute of a rudder. I am stripped to the waist, and the sweat rolls down into my eyes, almost blinding me. I have been over the side twice this afternoon for relief, but there is very little in the brackish water.

June 14.—Gervais slept on the planks with the crew last night, and this morning he looks ten years younger. His face is flushed and full, and the greenish hollows have disappeared from beneath his eyes. But Hanson isn't well. He complains of pains in his chest, and once or twice he spat a mixture of blood and rum. His big face seems sandpapered by age, and he is abnormally pale.

June 15.—No breeze. Hanson is surely stricken. Death hovers over him like an impatient doorman. He lies in his cabin and groans, and I can do nothing for him. His pallor is genuinely alarming. Even his lips are bloodless. He complains of his nose, and noises in his ears. And Gervais has shown his first glints of ill-nature. His eyes smolder when he speaks, and for the first time I discern a hard cruelty in the man. He is an alarming personality.

June 16.—Hanson died this morning. A horrible, racking death. It seemed as though he wanted to tell us something. I laid my ear on his broken, watery lips, but was unable to make out anything intelligible from his forced moaning. Gervais actually gloated over his death. What can it mean? Why such a metamorphosis in the man we befriended? He owes everything to our generosity. Human beings are utterly despicable, and

I have lost faith in them. He gloats over the misfortunes of others. He actually smiled as we dropped poor Hanson into the sea. Imagine it!

June 17.—There is still no wind. There is something unnatural about this floating hulk. Even the cook has noticed it.

"It ain't natural," he said, "for a ship to smell like this, and that Gervais fellow's cabin, phew! It not only stunk, but——"

I clouted him behind the ear. "You're a fool!" I shouted. "He's all right."

You have a feeling that he knows more than ten ordinary men whenever he opens his mouth to tell one of his amazing yarns. And that tale of the French fleet he told yesterday was so real, so vivid! But it set me to thinking. I must confess the smell of Gervais' cabin did horrify me. I entered it while Gervais was on deck, and the stench nearly laid me out. The place smelt like a charnel house. The odor of decaying shell-fish mingled with a peculiarly offensive and acrid smell that in some way suggested newly shed blood. Tonight I shall finish the rum. Oh, I will get gloriously drunk, but what does it matter?

June 18.—Gervais has grown currish and cynical. He has assumed the authority to curse my men, and refuses to speak to me. This morning Harry Knudson went below to lie down. He was as white as a squid's belly. All I could do was to perform a cursory examination. I told him to strip, and examined his entire body. He was pitifully lean and bloodless. Something had bitten him in the chest. A round discoloration showed plainly on the center of his chest, and in the very middle were two sharp incisions, from which blood and pus trickled ominously. I didn't like the looks of it and told him so. Harry smiled grimly and turned over in his bunk.

June 19.—Gervais seems to have appointed himself king of the ship. He does whatever he pleases. This morning he cut a strip of sail down and improvised a novel marquee for himself on the poop-deck. All during the late afternoon he reclined under the canvas, smoking his briar and gazing reflectively out to sea. None of the men approached him; they want as little as possible to do with so temperamental a person. We were all occupied forward when we heard a triumphant shout from Gervais. He was jumping around under his marquee and pointing over the side. It was Hanson's body, floating face upward, not ten feet from the ship. His nose was gone, and his cheekbones protruding through the wasted skin. The water was so still he seemed to hang there, leering up at the ship. When we buried him yesterday, we sewed his body in canvas and weighted it. Evidently the stitching had loosened, and the suddenly released, air-filled body had popped to the top like a cork.

June 20.—An unaccountable incident occurred on deck today. I am obliged to believe that Gervais is insane. Roland Perresson was working on the braces, and his hand accidentally slipped. He cut himself badly. The blood gushed down his arm, and we all feared he had severed an artery. His under lip trembled, but he didn't complain or cry out. He simply walked with unsteady steps toward the fo'castle. Gervais was on the poop-deck, in his throne room, as we have begun to call it. The sight of Perresson's uncertain steps somehow excited him. He made for Perresson. Perresson saw him coming, and stopped, a little puzzled, a little hopeful. In a moment Gervais had seized upon the injured arm. He gripped it forcefully and stuck it under his shirt. Gervais was sweating and acting like one possessed. I feared for Perresson. The situation was unhealthy. I stepped forward to interfere. But when I reached

them they were free of each other. Perresson held his arm and groaned.

"There's no blood on it," he bellowed, "and it's as cold as ice."

I could only stand and stare. Is Gervais mad, or has he mastered some monstrous system of healing?

June 21.—Roland Perresson is dead. I disposed of the body this morning. It was white and rigid, and I noticed an extraordinary discoloration above the wound on his wrist. From the elbow down, his arm was a bright green. I cannot explain it. Blood-poisoning, perhaps; but I will stand little more from Gervais. His presence has become odious to me.

Something walked again tonight. It bent above my bed and I heard it gulp. We have become so few, we are mentally drawn together for protection against an alien evil. We are not certain what it is, but we must do something.

JUNE 22.—This morning after a half-hearted gesture at making my rounds I retired to the ship's library. It was fairly cool there and I thought I could get away from myself for a bit, although there is no breaking from this ship and sea and sky. But now I wish I hadn't. I picked up an old water-stained parchment volume, called *The Islands of France,* a ridiculous miscellany of witchcraft and spirits. I chuckled to myself as I indolently flicked the pages until my interest was finally arrested by the childish awe and belief in the following:

"There lies a beautiful island called Gautier off the southwest tip of France. You may walk from heavy 'Druid' depths of the forest to the brilliant blue glare of the ocean, where the fishermen spread out their nets of bright blue cord to dry, and fisherwomen make out at low tide to gather mussels, sold in the shell for two cents a quart. If you ask them what is the next land they reply, *'L'Amerique est là-bas'*—America is over there. They are a naïve folk, few of them ever having been away from the island. They will gladly tell you about the old legends of the island, and what's more, believe them. There was the unfortunate Suzanne, the young girl, cruel or unfaithful to her lover, who was changed into a big black dog or female wolf. Unless she repented or a miracle restored her to her natural shape, she was doomed to lope, howling through the black naked woods, longing for death, until killed. Only a special bullet, properly blessed, could kill her, which made it difficult.

"There were also the beak-faced hunchbacks, that lived in the sea. These deformed people made periodical raids on the good villagers. If they were displeased they had the unpleasant habit of dragging corpses through the streets with loud cries. And it didn't take much to displease them, although no one could remember their ever having perpetrated bodily harm.

"There were the 'slacks' or noisy drones. Spirits of those that had met a violent death, they wandered through the night, repeating the cries of agony with which they had died, often from age to age. The old fisherwomen even yet hear them howling on long winter nights.

"There were, and according to the belief of many still are, sorcerers and sorceresses; they are looked upon as outsiders, feared, hated and never touched. It is a form of our ancient and respectable belief in witchcraft. If you meet one in your path, to avoid destruction you must immediately make the sign of the cross, seize a piece of earth, and hold it above your head, because between two pieces of earth, the ground under your feet and the piece held in a quivering hand above your head, no evil spirit can harm you.

"It is a dangerous sign on this island when those little corpse-dragging dwarfs ring a bell as they go along, for that means another death; a bad sign also if a church bell rings without any hand touching it.

"Those are still living who have seen the *dames blanches*—white ladies—howling in the night at church doors, seeking salvation and relief.

"Alain Gervais, the villagers relate, was swimming with other youths of his age in the St. Jacques basin; of a frolicsome and adventurous nature, he swam some distance from shore. According to another youth who was making his way to Alain at all possible speed, he took what seemed an intentional surface dive, and did not appear again. Many hours were spent fruitlessly diving for his body. A few years later, one of the boys, now grown into a man, was stationed at the watch of a fishing-boat, when he saw the rough caricature of a man, diving and breaking for air a short distance from his craft. He insisted he recognized Gervais."

A few lame conjectures followed, on the ability of a man being enabled to live at the bottom of the sea.

I remember flinging the book from me as if it were some abhorrent dead thing, and rising weakly, I made my way on deck with a troubled mind.

JUNE 23.—I buttonholed Peter Bunce this morning forward of the lee scuppers. I told him in ragged, forceful exclamations just what I had read. He ponderously turned my story over in his numbed brain. His eyes rolled crazily and his mouth sagged. His face turned yellow, but he caught himself with determination.

"We must act at once," he said.

June 24.—Our plans have been worked out. Peter and I are to bunk together tonight. We have my revolver and a razor-sharp, double-edged knife. Peter contends that the knife will be necessary. He insistently babbles of vampires and other blood-sucking demons. His obsession took an active form this noon. He jumped up and stepped around deftly, brandishing his knife in dark corners, and lunging wildly in offensive alacrity, cutting an imaginary victim to bits. I smiled rather wanly. Finally, exhausted, he slumped down on a stool, his head between his hands. My smile faded as I contemplated his abject dejection. Frankly, we don't know what to expect.

June 25.—It is over—poor Peter is gone—but Gervais will trouble us no more. I am stunned, horrified, but I owe it to Peter to write it all out.

I lay awake in my bunk, flat on my back, and the gnawed beams above me twitched like raw tendons. I had that tight, sick feeling of excitement twisting my stomach. We distinctly heard the door creak on its hinges. Something poised itself in the doorway. The door closed and it slid snake-like into the room. We could hear the thing gulp. Peter gripped my arm. I made ready to strike a match. I stiffened until its soft, slimy approach became unbearable; then I waited until it swayed at the foot of my bunk, until its green, glassy eyes were vaguely discernible in the almost total blackness. It was watching me, and I realized it could see in the dark.

I clawed at the match, lit it, and with a frantically shaking hand carried it to the tallow wick, and then—it sprang. But it didn't spring at me. It went higher and got Peter by the neck. I could hear him choke and gasp. In passing me the thing had knocked the match from my hand, plunging the room once more into total darkness. I was paralyzed, unable to move or think. I sat on the edge of my bunk, deathly sick, and my heart

seemed to come up in my throat. The small room careened drunkenly. I finally became conscious of two dark objects struggling on the floor. I heard a gulping and a low moaning, and then the still night was rent with Peter's forced screams of horror. "Oh Lord, where are the rest?"

He shrieked and shrieked, and between the screams he vomited a torrent of jumbled words. "Green—eyes! Ugh! Ooze! Mouth! Wet!"

His last throttled shriek lashed at me like a whip. I finally managed another match and lit it. I kept my eyes averted, and carried the match quickly to the candle-wick. I knew that if I looked at the thing on the floor I would drop the match. I waited until the sickly glow flared, and then—I looked. Something was on top of Peter. It covered him and seemed about to absorb him. In its evil, distorted features I recognized a caricature of Gervais, but the evil in the man had sprouted. It had turned him into a jellyish, fishy monstrosity. His middle was festooned with soft flesh. His legs and arms actually gave. But worst of all, the body of the creature was covered with greenish scales, and it had pulsating pink suckers on its chest. These were lustily at work on Peter.

I thought of the revolver on my bunk, found it, and gripped the butt and leveled it. I aimed it at Peter and the thing on the floor. I fired at the two of them, for I honestly had no intention of sparing Peter. I knew that Peter would not want it, and the mute appeal in his eyes was unmistakable. Again objects refused to retain their identity in my sight. I cracked mentally.

I have a vague recollection of bringing two bodies on deck. I remember one was light, brittle and hollow like an empty match-box. The other, wet and strangely heavy, silvered its path with slime as I laboriously dragged it up the companionway. In the dim half-glow of the ship's watchlights, I bent over the bodies. Peter was done for, there was no doubt about it. My merciful shot at short range had found its mark, and one temple was singed with powder. I stooped and lifted him tenderly; then with a sob I lowered him gently into the ocean. I stood for a moment looking over the side, thinking of the finality of it all, and watching the ever widening ripples on the surface of the oily water.

Finally I turned to regard what was Gervais. With a mingling of loathing and interest I unhooked a lantern and set it near his head. The sickly glow jumped and played on the cruel, twisted features. To my surprize I perceived a slit deep in the folds of his neck, very much like the breathing-organs of a fish. The gill was rigid and distended now, revealing a dark inner lining of red. The body exuded an oily scum, malodorous even in the clean salt air. I hunched closer over the body, and to my amazement a look of ineffable happiness and gratitude had suffused Gervais' face. Was it the weird light, the softening touch of death, or final liberation? No one will ever know. But I do not think it requires an answer. I am ready to be finished with the entire matter, just as Gervais is finished. I later went down into Gervais' cabin and breathed deeply of the fresh, clean air that blew through it.

June 26.—We are saved. There is a breeze this morning. The heavy canvas is bellying, and all hands are busy forward. The gray sky above us is sagging like a wet blanket filled with spring rains. Our casks are on deck waiting for the downpour. I thank God that we are safely headed toward France.

The Interview

By H. SIVIA

The young reporter obtained a long interview with the Vandervere heir, but an astonishing surprize awaited him when he returned to the newspaper office

DAVE FRENCH wound his way in and out among the scattered desks in the city room of the *News-Telegram* to one corner where a thin, cabinet board partition separated the office of Davis, the city editor, from the news writers.

Without hesitating, he strode through the half-open door and faced the huge, red-faced man who sat behind a desk covered with telephones and scattered sheets of copy-paper.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked, looking down at the man.

Davis rapidly scrawled words on a sheet of paper. He stopped, picked up a lighted cigar from the edge of his desk, and puffed out a cloud of smoke. Then he looked up at French.

"Tomorrow," he said slowly, "is the fourteenth. And, being a reporter, that wouldn't mean anything to you, would it? But it so happens that Judson Vandervere comes of age on that day. Know what I mean?"

French's face lighted up.

"The steel millions!" he exclaimed. "The boy comes into the money!"

"Exactly. And we want a story. Get out to the house and see him. If he won't see you, burn the house down. He'll come out then. Get an interview. Earn your pay!"

French left the office and made his way back to his desk. He got his hat, trench coat, and a memorandum pad, and left the building.

Outside it was raining. French pulled the trench-coat collar up around his neck and turned the brim of his hat down to shield his face from the rain. Then he hailed a taxi and headed for Shore Oaks, where the Vandervere estate was located.

All during the ride, while the taxi rolled in and out among the heavy downtown traffic and finally passed into the suburbs, French turned over in his mind what he knew about Judson Vandervere. He did not know very much.

Right now, he thought, the heir to the steel millions was twenty years old. Five or six years before, he had been just an undersized kid going to some exclusive country day school and thinking nothing at all about his father's money. Then one day he had quit the school and come to town to study under a private tutor at his home. Shortly afterward, his father had died, leaving him an orphan with several million dollars.

It had dawned on young Vandervere then what his very generous allowance could do. And overnight he had become the nucleus of a mad bunch of playboys and girls who made the night spots, played polo, insulted reporters sent to interview them, got drunk and drove expensive foreign cars, and all of that. . . .

Life for Judson Vandervere had become one series of drunk driving and disorderly conduct charges after another. The perfect example of what happens to a spoiled brat with too much money,

French concluded as the taxi turned into Drury Road, deep in Shore Oaks.

"Stop at the Vandervere entrance," he directed the driver, and the cab rolled on for several hundred yards more and came to a halt before the entrance to the stone wall that surrounded the mansion.

FRENCH got out, told the driver to wait, and walked through the heavy, iron-grille gate that stood half open. He went along a wide flagstone walk for about thirty yards, climbed steps up a slight terrace and stood in the rain on a small concrete porch. He rapped on the huge oak door several times with the metal rapper, and waited.

Presently the door opened, and a very tall butler dressed in a black tie and coat confronted French. His hair was extremely white, and his face was even whiter. It seemed to French that the man had the most death-like appearance of anyone he had ever seen.

But it wasn't so much the paleness of the man's skin, nor the solemnity of his appearance, as it was the gash in his forehead that amazed French. It was a deep, jagged cut, from which a thin trickle of blood had run down the man's temple and caked there. Apparently it caused no pain, although it looked painful enough and was sorely in need of dressing.

The butler looked down a long, thin nose, and his deep-set gray eyes bored into French.

"Yes?" he queried.

"I'd like to see Judson Vandervere, please," French answered.

"Who shall I say is calling?"

"French. David French. Perhaps he won't recognize the name. I'd like to see him for a short while on a business call."

The man hesitated, then: "Oh, I see. You're a newspaperman. I'm sorry. Mister Vandervere never gives interviews to the press."

French suddenly felt cold all over. He had known it would be hard, but he had to see Vandervere. For a moment he started to protest, but decided: "What's the use?" Then he turned to go.

The door was almost closed behind him when he heard a youthful voice call out from inside:

"Who is it, Felton? Why don't you show them in?"

"It's a reporter, sir," French heard Felton reply. "I didn't think you'd care to see him."

"Oh, yes, by all means. Show him in. It's about time I let the public in on my goings-on."

French, so happy that he trembled, turned and strode through the great door as Felton, the ghost-like butler, holding out his hand for the reporter's hat and coat, opened it wide to receive him.

Inside he came face to face with a young man whom he took to be Vandervere. The man was small in stature and had an old-looking face, even whiter than the butler's skin. His head was twisted to one side, and he kept rubbing the side of his neck with his palm.

"I'm Jud Vandervere," he said. "Sit down and tell me what it is you want. Perhaps I can give you a little help anyway. I'm awfully tired. Had quite a shake-up in the auto a few hours ago. Cut Felton up a bit, as you probably noticed, and twisted my neck pretty badly."

FRENCH sat down in an immense sofa, made a few brief remarks about automobile accidents in general, and got out his notebook.

"I suppose you'll want to know all about my wild life," Vandervere remarked casually. "How many cars I've wrecked; how many times I've been

pinched; who I'm engaged to now. All of that."

French thought for a second, then said:

"No, not exactly. You see, I thought I'd get a new angle and work it in around the fact that you are coming of age tomorrow. Something, perhaps, that the public doesn't know about. Something all your own. That is, if you don't mind."

"Oh, no. I don't mind. Fact is, I'd like the public to know some of the real things in my life. They were always so eager to gobble up the false stuff.

"First, I want to say this: I'm through with all the old wildness. You can quote me directly on that."

His voice seemed to float along, and his eyes gazed across the room through a French window into the slow rain outside.

"No more drunkenness. No more night life. I won't be making your headlines and your scandal columns any more after today. It's a new life for me. Yes, a new life."

A sort of dreaminess crept into the steel heir's weary, dark eyes as he paused in his speech to sigh and rub his neck some more.

French rapidly jotted notes on the memorandum pad and paused occasionally to watch the strange expression on the young man's face. Vandervere talked on and on, for an hour or so, giving intimate details of his life: small, half-forgotten incidents that lodge precariously, as it were, in one's mind.

Finally, when it was obvious to French that the interview was at an end, he arose from the deep sofa, thanked Vandervere for granting him the privilege, and got his hat and coat from Felton, who still had the dry blood caked on his temple.

At the door young Vandervere stood for a moment and talked with French, and his last words to the reporter were: "Remember, no more wild times for me. You can quote me on that. It's a new life from now on."

For a moment it seemed that the flicker of a smile crossed the heir's face. Then Felton closed the great oak door, and the rain began to beat in French's face once more.

Somehow, he was glad to be outside in the rain again, away from the strange coldness that the inside of the great old mansion presented; glad to be away from the strange old butler with the gashed and bloody forehead; away from the white-faced young heir who spoke in such a dreamy way of his resolve to put the old life behind him.

The interview had not been at all as French had expected it to be. In his mind he had pictured Vandervere as a smug, self-satisfied young snob who would make insulting remarks to him and decline to grant an interview. It had been so different.

The taxi was still waiting near the iron-grille entrance gate. French entered it and was whisked back to the city, to the spot from which he had departed something like two hours before. He got out, paid the driver, and entered the *News-Telegram* building.

STRIDING rapidly through the lobby of the building, he reached the elevator and was carried to the fourth floor. He got out and wound his way through the city room, past his desk, to the cabinet-board partition that blocked off Davis' office.

Smiling broadly, the memorandum pad flopping back and forth in his hand, he walked through the door and faced the red-faced man inside.

"Boy, was that a cinch!" he exclaimed, beaming at the city editor, who had not yet looked up from the paper-littered

desk. "I can't understand why so many guys always thought that Vandervere fellow was hard to get at. I got everything I asked and more too. Why, the guy was a phonograph. And it's all in here." He tapped the memorandum pad.

Then, for the first time, Davis looked up, and the expression on his face frightened French momentarily. He recovered quickly, however, and said:

"Well, I'll get to work on writing it. Won't take long. I just wanted to let you know I got it okey."

Davis' red face became even redder as it slowly contorted in a rage that only city editors can summon up.

"You lunkhead!" he stormed. "You nitwit! You're fired! There's no place around here for men like you, who call themselves reporters. Get out!"

French was startled first, then frightened. He stammered:

"But b-boss, I—I don't under——"

"So you don't understand, huh? I thought you wouldn't. Hell, French, you knew Vandervere wasn't going to be easy to see. In fact, you would have considered yourself very damned lucky to get into his house. So when you couldn't see him, you decided to frame an interview for me, and you thought I'd be sucker enough to take it. But the funny thing, French, is this: neither one of us knew Jud Vandervere was out of town and had been for the past three or four days."

"B-but w-wait. I did see——" French stuttered.

Davis interrupted him: "On the way out, while getting your stuff together, you can get your check. And you might read this, too. It came in on the teletype a few minutes after you left the office."

He handed French a sheet of typewritten paper, and the former reporter turned and left the office, reading the sheet as he wove in and out among the desks.

He sank in the chair at his desk, feeling queer deep down in the pit of his stomach. And it all came to him then: the butler with the gashed forehead, the white-faced young heir, the strange coldness about the house. But he thought, this couldn't be true! Things like this didn't happen! But it was there, all too clearly, on the printed sheet before him:

Alton, April 13.—Judson Vandervere, scion to the immense Vandervere steel fortune, and Henry Felton, butler at the Vandervere home in Shore Oaks, were killed instantly early today when the car young Vandervere was driving apparently skidded on the wet pavement and went over an embankment near here.

Vandervere's neck was broken in the crash, while Felton, who was thrown through the windshield, died when a piece of glass went through his forehead and pierced his brain.

The bodies were positively identified by Vandervere's uncle, who came along a short while after the accident. The three of them had been part of a group who spent the past several days at the Vandervere hunting-lodge on Moose Head Lake.

It is a well known fact that Vandervere was a very reckless driver and had been arraigned several times for . . .

The Creeper in the Crypt

By ROBERT BLOCH

A tale of stark horror in a gangster's hide-out in the dread cellar of an evil house in legend-haunted Arkham

IN ARKHAM, where ancient gables point like wizard's fingers to the sky, strange tales are told. But then, strange tales are always current in Arkham. There is a tale for every rotting ruin, a story for every little corpse-eye window that stares out at the sea when the fog comes up.

Here, fantastic fancy seems to flourish, nourished at the shriveled witch-paps of the town itself, sucking the graveyards dry of legend, and draining at the dark dugs of superstition.

For Arkham was a queer place, once; abode of witch and warlock, familiar and fiend. In olden days the King's men cleared the town of wizardry. Again, in 1818, the new Government stepped in to destroy some particularly atrocious burrows in and about some of the more ancient houses and, incidentally, to dig up a graveyard better left untouched. Then, in 1869, came the great immigrant panic in Old Town Street, when the moldering mansion of Cyrus Hook was burned to the ground by fear-crazed foreigners.

Even since then there have been scares. The affair of the "witch-house" and the peculiar episodes attendant upon the fate of certain missing children at All-Hallows time have caused their share of talk.

But that isn't why the "G-men" stepped in. The Federal Government is usually uninterested in supernatural stories. That is, they were, up to the time I told the authorities about the death of Joe Regetti. That's how they happened to come; I brought them.

Because, you see, I was with Joe Regetti just before he died, and shortly after. I didn't see him die, and I'm thankful for that. I don't think I could have stood watching if what I suspect is true.

It's because of what I suspect that I went to the Government for help. They've sent men down here now, to investigate, and I hope they find enough to convince them that what I have told them is actual fact. If they don't find the tunnels, or I was mistaken about the trapdoor, at least I can show them Joe Regetti's body. That ought to convince anybody, I guess.

I can't blame them for being skeptical, though. I was skeptical myself, once, and so were Joe Regetti and his mob, I suppose. But since then I have learned that it is wiser not to scoff at what one does not understand. There are more things on earth than those who walk about upon its surface—there are *others* that creep and crawl below.

2

I HAD never heard of Joe Regetti until I was kidnapped. That isn't so hard to understand. Regetti was a gangster, and a stranger in the town. I am descended from Sir Ambrose Abbott, one of the original settlers.

At the time of which I speak, I was living alone in the family place on Bascom Street. The life of a painter demands solitude. My immediate family was dead, and although socially promi-

"There was something creeping across the cellar floor."

nent through accident of birth, I had but few friends. Consequently, it is hard to understand why Regetti chose me to kidnap first. But then, he was a stranger.

Later I learned that he had been in town only a week, staying ostensibly at a hotel with three other men, none of whom was subsequently apprehended.

But Joe Regetti was a totally unknown factor in my mind until that night when I left Tarleton's party at his home on Sewell Street.

It was one of the few invitations I had accepted in the past year. Tarleton had urged me, and as he was an old friend, I obliged. It had been a pleasant evening. Brent, the psychiatrist, was there, and Colonel Warren, as well as my old companions of college days, Harold Gauer and the Reverend Williams. After a pleasant enough evening, I left, planning to walk home as I usually did, by choice.

It was a lovely evening—with a dead moon, wrapped in a shroud of clouds, riding the purple sky. The old houses looked like silver palaces in the mystic moonlight; deserted palaces in a land where all but memories are dead. For the streets of Arkham are bare at midnight, and over all hangs the age-old enchantment of days gone by.

Trees tossed their twisted tops to the

sky, and stood like furtive conspirators in little groups together, while the wind whispered its plots through their branches. It was a night to inspire the fabulous thoughts and imaginative morbidities I loved so well.

I walked slowly, contentedly, my thoughts free and far away. I never saw the car following me, or the man lurking ahead in the gloom. I strolled past the great tree in front of the Carter house, and then, without warning, balls of fire burst within my head, and I plunged, unconscious, into waiting arms.

When I recovered, I was already there in the cellar, lying on a bench.

It was a large cellar—an old cellar. Wherever I looked there was stone and cobwebs. Behind me lay the stairs down which I had been carried. To the left was a little room, like a fruit-cellar. Far down the stone wall to the right I could discern the looming outlines of a coal-pile, though furnace there was none.

Directly in the space before me was a table and two chairs. The table was occupied by an oil lamp and a pack of cards in solitaire formation. The chairs were likewise occupied, by two men. My captors.

One of them, a big, red-faced man with the neck of a hog, was speaking.

"Yeah, Regetti. We got him easy. We follow him like you say, from house, and grab him in front of tree. Right away come here—nobody saw not'ing."

"Where's Slim and the Greek?" asked the man who was playing solitaire, looking up. He was short, slim, and sallow. His hair was dark, his complexion swarthy. Italian, I decided. Probably the leader. I realized, of course, that I had been kidnapped. Where I was or who my captors were I could not say. My throbbing head cleared, and I had enough sense not to bluster or start trouble. These weren't local men—not with those clothes—and there was an ominous bulge in the dark man's coat-pocket. I decided to play 'possum and await developments.

The hog-necked man was replying to the other's question.

"I tell Slim and Greek to go back to hotel with car," he said. "Just like you say, boss."

"Good work, Polack," said the other, lighting a cigar.

"I do my best for you, Joe Regetti," said the big man, in his broken dialect.

"Yeah. Sure. I know you do," the swarthy Regetti replied. "Just keep it up, and we're going to be all set, see? Once I put the snatch on a few more of these birds, we'll clean up. The local coppers are all stiffs, and as soon as I get a line on some more of these old families we'll be taking in the dough regular."

"I BEG your pardon," I said.

"Oh, awake, eh?" The thin Italian didn't move from the table. "Glad to hear it. Sorry the boys had to get rough, mister. Just sit tight and everything's going to be swell."

"I'm glad to hear that," I replied, sarcastically. "You see, I'm not accustomed to being kidnapped."

"Well, let me handle it," said Joe Regetti. "I'll show you the ropes."

"Thanks," I retorted. "You already have." And I pointed to the ones that bound my hands and feet.

"Sense of humor, eh? O. K. Hope your friends come across with the dough after they get this letter I wrote, or maybe the rest isn't going to be so funny."

"What next?" I said, desperately hoping that something would turn up to give me an opening of some sort.

"You'll see soon enough," advised the man. "First, I'm going to sit up with you down here for the rest of the night."

The Pole's face paled.

"No, boss," he begged. "You no stay down here."

"Why not?" rasped Regetti, harshly. "What's the matter with you, Polack—turning yellow on me, eh?"

"I'm not," whined the man. "But you know what was happen here before, boss—how they find Tony Fellippo's leg lyin' on floor with no body left."

"Lay off the bedtime stories," Regetti chuckled. "You yokels make me sick with that stuff."

"But dot's true, boss. They never was for to find any more of old Tony Fellippo—just his leg on cellar floor. Dot why his mob go 'way so quick. They no want for to die, too."

"What do you mean, die?" snarled Regetti, testily.

The Pole's face paled, and his voice sank to a hushed whisper that blended with the cellar's darkness; a shadow voice in a shadow world.

"Dot what everyone say, boss. Dot house is witched—like haunted one, maybe. Nobody put Tony Fellippo on spot—dot feller, he too dam' smart guy. But he sit all alone here one night, and somet'ing come up from earth and swallow him, all but leg."

"Will you shut up?" Regetti cut in. "That's a lot of hooey. Some wise guy put the heat on Fellippo and got rid of the body. Only his leg was left to scare off the rest of his mob. Are you trying to tell me a ghost killed him, sap?"

"Yah, sure," insisted the Pole. "No man kill Tony. Not like you say, anyhow. Find leg, all right, but all over is lot blood on floor, and little pieces skin. No feller kill man like dot—only spirit. Vampire, maybe."

"Nuts!" Regetti was scornfully biting his cigar.

"Maybe so. But look—here is blood." And the Pole pointed a stubby finger at the floor and cellar wall to the left. Regetti followed it with his gaze.

There was blood, all right—great, rusty blobs of blood, spattered all over the floor and wall like the pigments on the palette of a mad painter.

"No man kill odder feller like dot," the Pole muttered. "Not even ax make such mess. And you know what fellers they say about Fellippo's leg—was all full of tooth-marks."

"Right," mused the other, thoughtfully. "And the rest of his gang did get out of here pretty fast after it happened. Didn't try to hide the body, or do anything about it." He frowned. "But that doesn't prove any balony about ghosts, or vampires. You been reading too many bum magazines lately, Polack."

He laughed.

"What about iron door?" grumbled the Pole, accusingly, his red face flushing. "What about iron door back of coal in coal-pile, huh? You know what fellers down by Black Jim's place say about house with iron door in cellar."

"Yeah." Regetti's face clouded.

"You no look by iron door yet, boss," the man continued. "Maybe you find somet'ing behind door yet, like fellers say—dot where t'ing dot got Fellippo come from; dot where it hide. Police they not find door either, when they come. Just find leg, and blood, and shut up house. But fellers know. They tell me plenty about house with iron door in cellar; say it bad place from old days when witch-fellers live here. It lead to hill back of house; cemetery, maybe. Perhaps dot's why nobody live here so long—afraid of what hides on other side of door; what come out and kill Tony Fellippo. I know about house with iron door in cellar, all right."

I KNEW about the house, too. So that's where I was! In the old Chambers house on Pringle Street! Many a story I've heard from the old folks when I was a boy about the old man, Ezekiel Chambers, whose wizard tricks bequeathed him such an unsavory reputation in Colonial days. I knew about Jonathan Dark, the other owner, who had been tried for smuggling just before the terrible days of 1818, and the abhorrent practise of grave-robbing he had been said to pursue in the ancient cemetery directly behind the house, on the hill.

Many peculiar rumors were circulated about the moldering house with the iron door in the cellar at this time—about the door, particularly, which Dark was said to use as a passageway for bringing his stolen cadavers back to dispose of. It was even claimed that the door had never been opened when Dark was tried, because of his astounding and hideous claim that the key which locked it was on *the other side.* Dark had died during the trial, while in prison, babbling blasphemies that no man dared believe; monstrous hints of what lay beneath the old graveyard on the hill; of tunnels and burrows and secret vaults used in witch-days for unhallowed rites. He spoke of tenants in these vaults, too, and of what sometimes would come to visit the house from below when a wizard invoked it with the proper spells and sacrifice. There was more, too—but then, Dark was quite mad. At least, everyone thought it better to believe so.

Old tales die. The house had stood deserted for many years, until most men forgot the reason for which it had been forsaken, ascribing its vacancy only to age. The public today were utterly unaware of the legends. Only the old ones remembered—the old ones who whispered their stories to me when I was a boy.

So this was the Dark house to which I had been brought! And this was the very cellar of the tales in question! I gathered from the remarks between Regetti and the superstitious Pole that another gang had recently used it for a hideaway until the death of their leader; indeed, I even vaguely remembered some newspaper reports of Tony Fellippo's mysterious murder.

And now Regetti had come from New York to use it as a base.

Clever scheme of his, evidently—coming to an old New England town and kidnapping the local gentry to hold for ransom; then hiding them away in some old, deserted house so conveniently protected by superstition. I supposed that there would be more victims after me, too; the man was smart and cunning enough to get away with it.

These thoughts flashed through my mind during the argument between the Pole and his leader. But their altercation came to an abrupt halt.

"I wish you get out of here," the Pole was saying. "If you stay only one night dot t'ing he come. Dot's all Tony Fellippo stay."

"Shut up, you fool. Didn't we stay here last night, too, before the job? And nothing happened."

"Yeah, sure. I know. But we stay upstairs, not by cellar. Why not keep feller upstairs?"

"Because we can't afford to risk being seen," Regetti snapped, wearily. "Now, cut the chatter."

He turned to me.

"Listen, you. I'm sending this guy out with a ransom letter right now, to your friends back at the party. All you have to do is keep your mouth shut and sit tight. But any funny business means you're through, see?"

I kept silent.

"Take him in there, Polack, and tie

him up." Regetti indicated a fruit-cellar adjacent to the stairs.

The Pole, still grumbling, dragged me across the floor and into the room. He lit a candle, casting strange shadows over the cobwebbed, dust-drowned shelving on the walls. Jars of preserves still stood untouched, storing, perhaps, the crop of a hundred years ago. Broken jars were still strewn about on the tottering table. As I glanced about, the Pole tossed me into a chair beside the rickety board, and proceeded to lash me to it firmly with a stout rope. I was not gagged or blindfolded again, though the choking atmosphere about me served as a good substitute for both.

He left me, closing the door. I was alone in the candle-lit quiet.

I strained my ears, and was rewarded by hearing Regetti dismiss his henchman for the night, evidently to deliver the ransom note to the proper authorities. He, Regetti, would stay behind on guard.

"Don't run into any ghosts on your way," he called after his companion, as the big Pole lumbered up the stairs.

A slamming outer door was his only response. From the ensuing quiet I judged Regetti had gone back to his solitaire.

Meanwhile, I looked about for some means of escape. I found it at last, on the table beside me. The broken jars—glass edges to cut my bonds!

PURPOSEFULLY I edged my chair closer to the table end. If I could get a piece of that glass in my hands . . .

As I moved, I strained my ears once more to make sure that any noise made by the chair would be inaudible to Regetti, waiting outside. There was no sound from the chair as I reached the table, and I sighed with relief as I maneuvered my pinioned hands until they grasped a piece of glass firmly. Then I began to rub it against the edge of the rope which bound them.

It was slow work. Minutes ticked away into hours, and still no sound from outside, save a muffled series of snores. Regetti had fallen asleep over his cards. Good! Now, if I could get my wrists free and work on my feet, I would be able to make it.

My right hand was loose at last, though my wrist was damp with mingled sweat and blood. Cutting away from behind was not a precise, calculated sort of job. Quickly I finished the work on my left, then rubbed my swollen fingers and bent over to saw at the ropes on my legs.

Then I heard the sound.

It was the grating of rusty hinges. Anyone who has lived in archaic houses all his life learns to recognize the peculiar, eery clang. Rusty hinges grating from the cellar beyond . . . from *an iron door?* A scuffling sound among the coal . . . *the iron door is concealed by the coal-pile.* Fellippo only stayed down here one night. All they found was his leg.

Jonathan Dark, babbling on his deathbed. The door locked from the other side. Tunnels to the graveyard. What lurks in graveyards, ancient and unseen, then creeps from crypts to feast?

A scream rose in my throat, but I choked it back. Regetti still snored. Whatever was going on in the outer room, I must not wake him and lose my only chance of escape. Instead, I had best hasten and free my legs. I worked feverishly, but my ears were alert for developments.

They came. The noise in the coal-pile abruptly ceased, and I went limp with relief. Perhaps rats were at work.

A moment later I would have given anything to have heard the coal rattling again, if only to drown out the new noise.

There was something creeping across the cellar floor; something crawling, as if

on hands and knees; something with long nails or claws that rasped and scraped. There was something croaking and chuckling as it moved through the cellar dark; something that wheezed with bestial, sickening laughter, like the death-rattle in the throat of a plague-stricken corpse.

Oh, how slyly it crept—how slowly, cautiously, and sinisterly! I could hear it slinking in the shadows, and my fingers raced at their work, even while my brain grew numb.

Traffic between tombs and a wizard's house—traffic with things the old wives say can never die.

Regetti snored on.

What bides below, in caverns, that can be invoked by the proper spell—or the sight of prey?

Creep.

And then . . .

REGETTI awoke. I heard him scream, once. He didn't even have time to get up or draw his gun. There was a demoniac scurrying across the floor, as if made by a giant rat. Then the faint sound of shredding flesh, and over all, a sudden ghoulish baying that conjured up worlds of nightmare horror in my shattered brain.

Above the howling came a series of low, almost animal moans, and agonized phrases in Italian, cries for mercy, prayers, curses.

Claws make no sound as they sink into flesh, and yellow fangs are silent till they grate on bone. . . .

My left leg was free, then my right. Now I slashed at the rope around my waist. Suppose it came in here?

The baying ceased, but the silence was haggard with horror.

There are some banquets without toasts. . . .

And now, once again, moans. My spine shivered. All around me the shadows grinned, for outside was revelry as in the olden days. Revelry, and a thing that moaned, and moaned, and moaned.

Then I was loose. As the moaning died away in the darkness, I cut the final strands of rope that bound me to my chair. . . .

I did not leave at once, for there were still sounds in the other room which I did not like; sounds which caused my soul to shrivel, and my sanity to succumb before a nameless dread.

I heard that pawing and padding rustle along the floor, and after the shrieking had ceased, a worse noise took its place—a *burbling* noise—as if someone or something was sucking marrow from a bone. And the terrible, *clicking* sound; the feeding sound of gigantic teeth. . . .

Yes, I waited; waited until the crunching had mercifully ceased, and then waited on until the rustling slithered back into the cellar, and disappeared. When I heard the brazen clang of a rusty door grate in the distance, I felt safe.

It was then that I left at last; passing through the now-deserted cellar, up the stairs, and out unguarded doors into the silver security of a moonlit night. It was very good to see the street-lights again, and hear the trolleys rumble from afar. My taxi took me to the precinct station, and after I had told my story the police did the rest.

I told my story, but I did not mention the iron door against the hillside. That I saved for the ears of the Government men. Now they can do what they like about it, since I am far away. But I did not want anybody prying around too closely to that door while I remained in the city, because even now I cannot—dare not—say what might lurk behind it. The hillside leads to the graveyard, and the graveyard to places far beneath. And in olden days there was a curious traffic betwixt tomb and tunnel and a wiz-

ard's house; traffic not confined to men alone. . . .

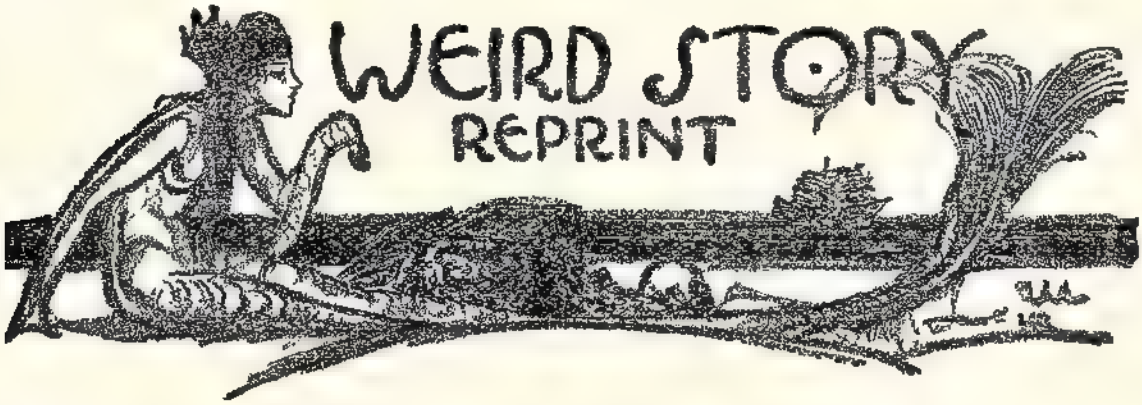
I'm pretty positive about all this, too. Not alone from the disappearance of the Fellippo gang, or the wildly whispered tales of the foreign men; not alone from these, but from a much more concrete and ghastly proof.

It is a proof I don't care to speak about even today—a proof that the police know, but which is fortunately deleted from newspaper accounts of the tragedy.

What men will find behind that iron door I will not venture to say, but I think I know why only Fellippo's leg was found before. I did not look at the iron door before I left the house, but I did see something else in the cellar as I passed through to the stairs. That is why I ran frantically up the steps; that is why I went to the Government, and that is why I never want to go back to witch-haunted, age-accursed Arkham. I found proof.

Because when I went out, I saw Joe Regetti sitting in his chair by the table in the cellar. The lamp was on, and I am quite sure I saw no foot-prints. I'm glad of that. But I did see Joe Regetti sitting in his chair, and then I knew the meaning of the screams, and the crunching, and the padding sound.

Joe Regetti, sitting in his chair in the cellar lamplight, *with his naked body chewed entirely to ribbons by gigantic and unhuman teeth!*



The Hounds of Tindalos*

By FRANK BELKNAP LONG, JR.

"I'M GLAD you came," said Chalmers. He was sitting by the window and his face was very pale. Two tall candles guttered at his elbow and cast a sickly amber light over his long nose and slightly receding chin. Chalmers would have nothing modern about his apartment. He had the soul of a mediæval ascetic, and he preferred illuminated manuscripts to automobiles, and leering stone gargoyles to radios and adding-machines.

As I crossed the room to the settee he had cleared for me I glanced at his desk and was surprized to discover that he had

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been studying the mathematical formulæ of a celebrated contemporary physicist, and that he had covered many sheets of thin yellow paper with curious geometric designs.

"Einstein and John Dee are strange bedfellows," I said as my gaze wandered from his mathematical charts to the sixty or seventy quaint books that comprised his strange little library. Plotinus and Emanuel Moscopulus, St. Thomas Aquinas and Frenicle de Bessy stood elbow to elbow in the somber ebony bookcase, and chairs, table and desk were littered with pamphlets about mediæval sorcery and witchcraft and black magic, and all of the valiant glamorous things that the modern world has repudiated.

Chalmers smiled engagingly, and passed me a Russian cigarette on a curiously carved tray. "We are just discovering now," he said, "that the old alchemists and sorcerers were two-thirds *right,* and that your modern biologist and materialist is nine-tenths *wrong.*"

"You have always scoffed at modern science," I said, a little impatiently.

"Only at scientific dogmatism," he replied. "I have always been a rebel, a champion of originality and lost causes; that is why I have chosen to repudiate the conclusions of contemporary biologists."

"And Einstein?" I asked.

"A priest of transcendental mathematics!" he murmured reverently. "A profound mystic and explorer of the great *suspected.*"

"Then you do not entirely despise science."

"Of course not," he affirmed. "I merely distrust the scientific positivism of the past fifty years, the positivism of Haeckel and Darwin and of Mr. Bertrand Russell. I believe that biology has failed pitifully to explain the mystery of man's origin and destiny."

"Give them time," I retorted.

Chalmers' eyes glowed. "My friend," he murmured, "your pun is sublime. Give them *time.* That is precisely what I would do. But your modern biologist scoffs at time. He has the key but he refuses to use it. What do we know of time, really? Einstein believes that it is relative, that it can be interpreted in terms of space, of *curved* space. But must we stop there? When mathematics fails us can we not advance by—insight?"

"You are treading on dangerous ground," I replied. "That is a pitfall that your true investigator avoids. That is why modern science has advanced so slowly. It accepts nothing that it cannot demonstrate. But you——"

"I would take hashish, opium, all manner of drugs. I would emulate the sages of the East. And then perhaps I would apprehend——"

"What?"

"The fourth dimension."

"Theosophical rubbish!"

"Perhaps. But I believe that drugs expand human consciousness. William James agreed with me. And I have discovered a new one."

"A new drug?"

"It was used centuries ago by Chinese alchemists, but it is virtually unknown in the West. Its occult properties are amazing. With its aid and the aid of my mathematical knowledge I believe that I can *go back through time.*"

"I do not understand."

"Time is merely our imperfect perception of a new dimension of space. Time and motion are both illusions. Everything that has existed from the beginning of the world *exists now.* Events that occurred centuries ago on this planet continue to exist in another dimension of space. Events that will occur centuries from now *exist already.* We cannot perceive their existence because we cannot

enter the dimension of space that contains them. Human beings as we know them are merely fractions, infinitesimally small fractions of one enormous whole. Every human being is linked with *all* the life that has preceded him on this planet. All of his ancestors are parts of him. Only time separates him from his forebears, and time is an illusion and does not exist."

"I think I understand," I murmured.

"It will be sufficient for my purpose if you can form a vague idea of what I wish to achieve. I wish to strip from my eyes the veils of illusion that time has thrown over them, and see the *beginning and the end*."

"And you think this new drug will help you?"

"I am sure that it will. And I want you to help me. I intend to take the drug immediately. I cannot wait. I must *see*." His eyes glittered strangely. "I am going back, back through time."

He rose and strode to the mantel. When he faced me again he was holding a small square box in the palm of his hand. "I have here five pellets of the drug Liao. It was used by the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze, and while under its influence he visioned Tao. Tao is the most mysterious force in the world; it surrounds and pervades all things; it contains the visible universe and everything that we call reality. He who apprehends the mysteries of Tao sees clearly all that was and will be."

"Rubbish!" I retorted.

"Tao resembles a great animal, recumbent, motionless, containing in its enormous body all the worlds of our universe, the past, the present and the future. We see portions of this great monster through a slit, which we call time. With the aid of this drug I shall enlarge the slit. I shall behold the great figure of life, the great recumbent beast in its entirety."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"Watch, my friend. Watch and take notes. And if I go back too far you must recall me to reality. You can recall me by shaking me violently. If I appear to be suffering acute physical pain you must recall me at once."

"Chalmers," I said, "I wish you wouldn't make this experiment. You are taking dreadful risks. I don't believe that there is any fourth dimension and I emphatically do not believe in Tao. And I don't approve of your experimenting with unknown drugs."

"I know the properties of this drug," he replied. "I know precisely how it affects the human animal and I know its dangers. The risk does not reside in the drug itself. My only fear is that I may become lost in time. You see, I shall assist the drug. Before I swallow this pellet I shall give my undivided attention to the geometric and algebraic symbols that I have traced on this paper." He raised the mathematical chart that rested on his knee. "I shall prepare my mind for an excursion into time. I shall *approach* the fourth dimension with my conscious mind before I take the drug which will enable me to exercise occult powers of perception Before I enter the dream world of the Eastern mystics I shall acquire all of the mathematical help that modern science can offer. This mathematical knowledge, this conscious approach to an actual apprehension of the fourth dimension of time will supplement the work of the drug. The drug will open up stupendous new vistas—the mathematical preparation will enable me to grasp them intellectually. I have often grasped the fourth dimension in dreams, emotionally, intuitively, but I have never been able to recall, in waking life, the occult splendors that were momentarily revealed to me.

"But with your aid, I believe that I can

recall them. You will take down everything that I say while I am under the influence of the drug. No matter how strange or incoherent my speech may become you will omit nothing. When I awake I may be able to supply the key to whatever is mysterious or incredible. I am not sure that I shall succeed, but if I *do* succeed"—his eyes were strangely luminous—*"time will exist for me no longer!"*

He sat down abruptly. "I shall make the experiment at once. Please stand over there by the window and watch. Have you a fountain pen?"

I nodded gloomily and removed a pale green Waterman from my upper vest pocket.

"And a pad, Frank?"

I groaned and produced a memorandum book. "I emphatically disapprove of this experiment," I muttered. "You're taking a frightful risk."

"Don't be an asinine old woman!" he admonished. "Nothing that you can say will induce me to stop now. I entreat you to remain silent while I study these charts."

He raised the charts and studied them intently. I watched the clock on the mantel as it ticked out the seconds, and a curious dread clutched at my heart so that I choked.

Suddenly the clock stopped ticking, and exactly at that moment Chalmers swallowed the drug.

I ROSE quickly and moved toward him, but his eyes implored me not to interfere. "The clock has stopped," he murmured. "The forces that control it approve of my experiment. *Time* stopped, and I swallowed the drug. I pray God that I shall not lose my way."

He closed his eyes and leaned back on the sofa. All of the blood had left his face and he was breathing heavily. It was clear that the drug was acting with extraordinary rapidity.

"It is beginning to get dark," he murmured. "Write that. It is beginning to get dark and the familiar objects in the room are fading out. I can discern them vaguely through my eyelids, but they are fading swiftly."

I shook my pen to make the ink come and wrote rapidly in shorthand as he continued to dictate.

"I am leaving the room. The walls are vanishing and I can no longer see any of the familiar objects. Your face, though, is still visible to me. I hope that you are writing. I think that I am about to make a great leap—a leap through space. Or perhaps it is through time that I shall make the leap. I cannot tell. Everything is dark, indistinct."

He sat for a while silent, with his head sunk upon his breast. Then suddenly he stiffened and his eyelids fluttered open. "God in heaven!" he cried. "I *see!*"

He was straining forward in his chair, staring at the opposite wall. But I knew that he was looking beyond the wall and that the objects in the room no longer existed for him. "Chalmers," I cried, "Chalmers, shall I wake you?"

"Do not!" he shrieked. "I see *everything*. All of the billions of lives that preceded me on this planet are before me at this moment. I see men of all ages, all races, all colors. They are fighting, killing, building, dancing, singing. They are sitting about rude fires on lonely gray deserts, and flying through the air in monoplanes. They are riding the seas in bark canoes and enormous steamships; they are painting bison and mammoths on the walls of dismal caves and covering huge canvases with queer futuristic designs. I watch the migrations from Atlantis. I watch the migrations from Lemuria. I see the elder races—a strange horde of black dwarfs overwhelming

Asia, and the Neandertalers with lowered heads and bent knees ranging obscenely across Europe. I watch the Achæans streaming into the Greek islands, and the crude beginnings of Hellenic culture. I am in Athens and Pericles is young. I am standing on the soil of Italy. I assist in the rape of the Sabines; I march with the Imperial Legions. I tremble with awe and wonder as the enormous standards go by and the ground shakes with the tread of the victorious *hastati*. A thousand naked slaves grovel before me as I pass in a litter of gold and ivory drawn by night-black oxen from Thebes, and the flower-girls scream *'Ave Cæsar'* as I nod and smile. I am myself a slave on a Moorish galley. I watch the erection of a great cathedral. Stone by stone it rises, and through months and years I stand and watch each stone as it falls into place. I am burned on a cross head downward in the thyme-scented gardens of Nero, and I watch with amusement and scorn the torturers at work in the chambers of the Inquisition.

"I walk in the holiest sanctuaries; I enter the temples of Venus. I kneel in adoration before the Magna Mater, and I throw coins on the bare knees of the sacred courtezans who sit with veiled faces in the groves of Babylon. I creep into an Elizabethan theater and with the stinking rabble about me I applaud *The Merchant of Venice*. I walk with Dante through the narrow streets of Florence. I meet the young Beatrice, and the hem of her garmet brushes my sandals as I stare enraptured. I am a priest of Isis, and my magic astounds the nations. Simon Magus kneels before me, imploring my assistance, and Pharaoh trembles when I approach. In India I talk with the Masters and run screaming from their presence, for their revelations are as salt on wounds that bleed.

"I perceive everything *simultaneously*. I perceive everything from all sides; I am a part of all the teeming billions about me. I exist in all men and all men exist in me. I perceive the whole of human history in a single instant, the past and the present.

"By simply *straining* I can see farther and farther back. Now I am going back through strange curves and angles. Angles and curves multiply about me. I perceive great segments of time through *curves*. There is *curved time*, and *angular time*. The beings that exist in angular time cannot enter curved time. It is very strange.

"I am going back and back. Man has disappeared from the earth. Gigantic reptiles crouch beneath enormous palms and swim through the loathly black waters of dismal lakes. Now the reptiles have disappeared. No animals remain upon the land, but beneath the waters, plainly visible to me, dark forms move slowly over the rotting vegetation.

"The forms are becoming simpler and simpler. Now they are single cells. All about me there are angles—strange angles that have no counterparts on the earth. I am desperately afraid.

"There is an abyss of being which man has never fathomed."

I stared. Chalmers had risen to his feet and he was gesticulating helplessly with his arms. "I am passing through *unearthly* angles; I am approaching—oh, the burning horror of it!"

"Chalmers!" I cried. "Do you wish me to interfere?"

He brought his right hand quickly before his face, as though to shut out a vision unspeakable. "Not yet!" he cried; "I will go on. I will see—what—lies—beyond——"

A cold sweat streamed from his forehead and his shoulders jerked spasmodically. "Beyond life there are"—his face grew ashen with terror—"*things* that I

cannot distinguish. They move slowly through angles. They have no bodies, and they move slowly through outrageous angles."

It was then that I became aware of the odor in the room. It was a pungent, indescribable odor, so nauseous that I could scarcely endure it. I stepped quickly to the window and threw it open. When I returned to Chalmers and looked into his eyes I nearly fainted.

"I think they have scented me!" he shrieked. "They are slowly turning toward me."

He was trembling horribly. For a moment he clawed at the air with his hands. Then his legs gave way beneath him and he fell forward on his face, slobbering and moaning.

I watched him in silence as he dragged himself across the floor. He was no longer a man. His teeth were bared and saliva dripped from the corners of his mouth.

"Chalmers," I cried. "Chalmers, stop it! Stop it, do you hear?"

As if in reply to my appeal he commenced to utter hoarse convulsive sounds which resembled nothing so much as the barking of a dog, and began a sort of hideous writhing in a circle about the room. I bent and seized him by the shoulders. Violently, desperately, I shook him. He turned his head and snapped at my wrist. I was sick with horror, but I dared not release him for fear that he would destroy himself in a paroxysm of rage.

"Chalmers," I muttered, "you must stop that. There is nothing in this room that can harm you. Do you understand?"

I continued to shake and admonish him, and gradually the madness died out of his face. Shivering convulsively, he crumpled into a grotesque heap on the Chinese rug.

I CARRIED him to the sofa and deposited him upon it. His features were twisted in pain, and I knew that he was still struggling dumbly to escape from abominable memories.

"Whisky," he muttered. "You'll find a flask in the cabinet by the window—upper left-hand drawer."

When I handed him the flask his fingers tightened about it until the knuckles showed blue. "They nearly got me," he gasped. He drained the stimulant in immoderate gulps, and gradually the color crept back into his face.

"That drug was the very devil!" I murmured.

"It wasn't the drug," he moaned.

His eyes no longer glared insanely, but he still wore the look of a lost soul.

"They scented me in time," he moaned. "I went too far."

"What were *they* like?" I said, to humor him.

He leaned forward and gripped my arm. He was shivering horribly. "No words in our language can describe them!" He spoke in a hoarse whisper. "They are symbolized vaguely in the myth of the Fall, and in an obscene form which is occasionally found engraved on ancient tablets. The Greeks had a name for them, which veiled their essential foulness. The tree, the snake and the apple—these are the vague symbols of a most awful mystery.

His voice had risen to a scream. "Frank, Frank, a terrible and unspeakable *deed* was done in the beginning. Before time, the *deed,* and from the deed——"

He had risen and was hysterically pacing the room. "The seeds of the deed move through angles in dim recesses of time. They are hungry and athirst!"

"Chalmers," I pleaded to quiet him. "We are living in the third decade of the Twentieth Century."

"They are lean and athirst!" he shrieked. *"The Hounds of Tindalos!"*

"Chalmers, shall I phone for a physician?"

"A physician cannot help me now. They are horrors of the soul, and yet"—he hid his face in his hands and groaned—"they are real, Frank. I saw them for a ghastly moment. For a moment I stood on the *other side*. I stood on the pale gray shores beyond time and space. In an awful light that was not light, in a silence that shrieked, I saw *them*.

"All the evil in the universe was concentrated in their lean, hungry bodies. Or had they bodies? I saw them only for a moment; I cannot be certain. *But I heard them breathe*. Indescribably for a moment I felt their breath upon my face. They turned toward me and I fled screaming. In a single moment I fled screaming through time. I fled down quintillions of years.

"But they scented me. Men awake in them cosmic hungers. We have escaped, momentarily, from the foulness that rings them round. They thirst for that in us which is clean, which emerged from the deed without stain. There is a part of us which did not partake in the deed, and that they hate. But do not imagine that they are literally, prosaically evil. They are beyond good and evil as we know it. They are that which in the beginning fell away from cleanliness. Through the deed they became bodies of death, receptacles of all foulness. But they are not evil in *our* sense because in the spheres through which they move there is no thought, no morals, no right or wrong as we understand it. There is merely the pure and the foul. The foul expresses itself through angles; the pure through curves. Man, the pure part of him, is descended from a curve. Do not laugh. I mean that literally."

I rose and searched for my hat. "I'm dreadfully sorry for you, Chalmers," I said, as I walked toward the door. "But I don't intend to stay and listen to such gibberish. I'll send my physician to see you. He's an elderly, kindly chap and he won't be offended if you tell him to go to the devil. But I hope you'll respect his advice. A week's rest in a good sanitarium should benefit you immeasurably."

I heard him laughing as I descended the stairs, but his laughter was so utterly mirthless that it moved me to tears.

2

When Chalmers phoned the following morning my first impulse was to hang up the receiver immediately. His request was so unusual and his voice was so wildly hysterical that I feared any further association with him would result in the impairment of my own sanity. But I could not doubt the genuineness of his misery, and when he broke down completely and I heard him sobbing over the wire I decided to comply with his request.

"Very well," I said. "I will come over immediately and bring the plaster."

En route to Chalmers' home I stopped at a hardware store and purchased twenty pounds of plaster of Paris. When I entered my friend's room he was crouching by the window watching the opposite wall out of eyes that were feverish with fright. When he saw me he rose and seized the parcel containing the plaster with an avidity that amazed and horrified me. He had extruded all of the furniture and the room presented a desolate appearance.

"It is just conceivable that we can thwart them!" he exclaimed. "But we must work rapidly. Frank, there is a stepladder in the hall. Bring it here immediately. And then fetch a pail of water.

"What for?" I murmured.

He turned sharply and there was a

flush on his face. "To mix the plaster, you fool!" he cried. "To mix the plaster that will save our bodies and souls from a contamination unmentionable. To mix the plaster that will save the world from —Frank, *they must be kept out!*"

"Who?" I murmured.

"The Hounds of Tindalos!" he muttered. "They can only reach us through angles. We must eliminate all angles from this room. I shall plaster up all of the corners, all of the crevices. We must make this room resemble the interior of a sphere."

I knew that it would have been useless to argue with him. I fetched the step-ladder, Chalmers mixed the plaster, and for three hours we labored. We filled in the four corners of the wall and the intersections of the floor and wall and the wall and ceiling, and we rounded the sharp angles of the window-seat.

"I shall remain in this room until they return in time," he affirmed when our task was completed. "When they discover that the scent leads through curves they will return. They will return ravenous and snarling and unsatisfied to the foulness that was in the beginning, before time, beyond space."

He nodded graciously and lit a cigarette. "It was good of you to help," he said.

"Will you not see a physician, Chalmers?" I pleaded.

"Perhaps—tomorrow," he murmured. "But now I must watch and wait."

"Wait for what?" I urged.

Chalmers smiled wanly. "I know that you think me insane," he said. "You have a shrewd but prosaic mind, and you cannot conceive of an entity that does not depend for its existence on force and matter. But did it ever occur to you, my friend, that force and matter are merely the barriers to perception imposed by time and space? When one knows, as I do, that time and space are identical and that they are both deceptive because they are merely imperfect manifestations of a higher reality, one no longer seeks in the visible world for an explanation of the mystery and terror of being."

I rose and walked toward the door.

"Forgive me," he cried. "I did not mean to offend you. You have a superlative intellect, but I—I have a *superhuman* one. It is only natural that I should be aware of your limitations."

"Phone if you need me," I said, and descended the stairs two steps at a time. "I'll send my physician over at once," I muttered, to myself. "He's a hopeless maniac, and heaven knows what will happen if someone doesn't take charge of him immediately."

3

THE following is a condensation of two announcements which appeared in the Partridgeville Gazette *for July 3, 1928:*

Earthquake Shakes Financial District

At 2 o'clock this morning an earth tremor of unusual severity broke several plate-glass windows in Central Square and completely disorganized the electric and street railway systems. The tremor was felt in the outlying districts and the steeple of the First Baptist Church on Angell Hill (designed by Christopher Wren in 1717) was entirely demolished. Firemen are now attempting to put out a blaze which threatens to destroy the Partridgeville Glue Works. An investigation is promised by the mayor and an immediate attempt will be made to fix responsibility for this disastrous occurrence.

OCCULT WRITER MURDERED BY UNKNOWN GUEST

Horrible Crime in Central Square

Mystery Surrounds Death of Halpin Chalmers

At 9 a. m. today the body of Halpin Chalmers, author and journalist, was found in an empty room above the jewelry store of Smithwick and Isaacs, 24 Central Square. The coroner's investigation revealed that the room had been rented *furnished* to Mr. Chalmers on May 1, and that he had himself disposed of the furniture a fortnight ago. Chalmers was the author of several recondite books on occult themes, and a member of the Bibliographic Guild. He formerly resided in Brooklyn, New York.

At 7 a. m. Mr. L. E. Hancock, who occupies the apartment opposite Chalmers' room in the Smithwick and Isaacs establishment, smelt a peculiar odor when he opened his door to take in his cat and the morning edition of the *Partridgeville Gazette*. The odor he describes as extremely acrid and nauseous, and he affirms that it was so strong in the vicinity of Chalmers' room that he was obliged to hold his nose when he approached that section of the hall.

He was about to return to his own apartment when it occurred to him that Chalmers might have accidentally forgotten to turn off the gas in his kitchenette. Becoming considerably alarmed at the thought, he decided to investigate, and when repeated tappings on Chalmers' door brought no response he notified the superintendent. The latter opened the door by means of a pass key, and the two men quickly made their way into Chalmers' room. The room was utterly destitute of furniture, and Hancock asserts that when he first glanced at the floor his heart went cold within him,

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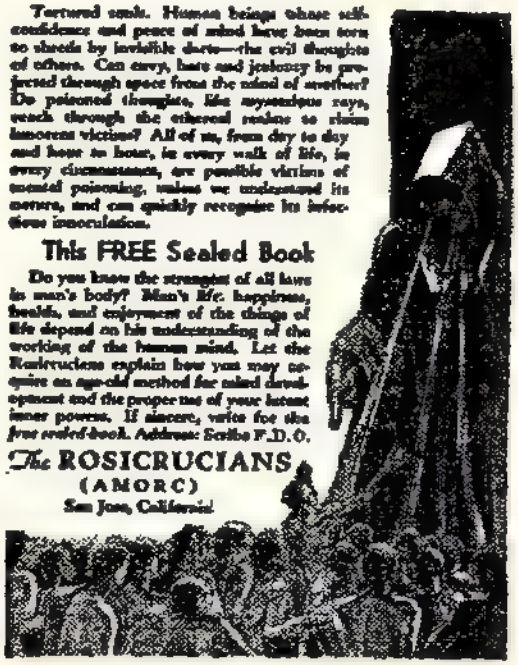

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and that the superintendent, without saying a word, walked to the open window and stared at the building opposite for fully five minutes.

Chalmers lay stretched upon his back in the center of the room. He was starkly nude, and his chest and arms were covered with a peculiar bluish pus or ichor. His head lay grotesquely upon his chest. It had been completely severed from his body, and the features were twisted and torn and horribly mangled. Nowhere was there a trace of blood.

The room presented a most astonishing appearance. The intersections of the walls, ceiling and floor had been thickly smeared with plaster of Paris, but at intervals fragments had cracked and fallen off, and someone had grouped these upon the floor about the murdered man so as to form a perfect triangle.

Beside the body were several sheets of charred yellow paper. These bore fantastic geometric designs and symbols and several hastily scrawled sentences. The sentences were almost illegible and so absurd in context that they furnished no possible clue to the perpetrator of the crime. "I am waiting and watching," Chalmers wrote. "I sit by the window and watch walls and ceiling. I do not believe they can reach me, but I must beware of the Doels. Perhaps *they* can help them break through. The satyrs will help, and they can advance through the scarlet circles. The Greeks knew a way of preventing that. It is a great pity that we have forgotten so much."

On another sheet of paper, the most badly charred of the seven or eight fragments found by Detective Sergeant Douglas (of the Partridgeville Reserve), was scrawled the following:

"Good God, the plaster is falling! A terrific shock has loosened the plaster and it is falling. An earthquake perhaps! I never could have anticipated this. It is growing dark in the room. I must phone Frank. But can he get here in time? I will try. I will recite the Einstein formula. I will—God, they are breaking through! They are breaking through! Smoke is pouring from the corners of the wall. Their *tongues*—ahhhhh——"

In the opinion of Detective Sergeant Douglas, Chalmers was poisoned by some obscure chemical. He has sent specimens of the strange blue slime found on Chalmers' body to the Partridgeville Chemical Laboratories; and he expects the report will shed new light on one of the most mysterious crimes of recent years. That Chalmers entertained a guest on the evening preceding the earthquake is certain, for his neighbor distinctly heard a low murmur of conversation in the former's room as he passed it on his way to the stairs. Suspicion points strongly to this unknown visitor and the police are diligently endeavoring to discover his identity.

4

REPORT of James Morton, chemist and bacteriologist:

My dear Mr. Douglas:

The fluid sent to me for analysis is the most peculiar that I have ever examined. It resembles living protoplasm, but it lacks the peculiar substances known as enzymes. Enzymes catalyze the chemical reactions occurring in living cells, and when the cell dies they cause it to disintegrate by hydrolyzation. Without enzymes protoplasm should possess enduring vitality, i. e., immortality. Enzymes are the negative components, so to speak, of unicellular organism, which is the basis of all life. That living matter can exist without enzymes biologists emphatically deny. And yet the substance that you have sent

me is alive and it lacks these "indispensable" bodies. Good God, sir, do you realize what astounding new vistas this opens up?

5

EXCERPT from The Secret Watchers *by the late Halpin Chalmers:*

What if, parallel to the life we know, there is another life that does not die, which lacks the elements that destroy *our* life? Perhaps in another dimension there is a *different* force from that which generates our life. Perhaps this force emits energy, or something similar to energy, which passes from the unknown dimension where *it* is and creates a new form of cell life in our dimension. No one knows that such new cell life does exist in our dimension. Ah, but I have seen *its* manifestations. I have *talked* with them. In my room at night I have talked with the Doels. And in dreams I have seen their maker. I have stood on the dim shore beyond time and matter and seen *it*. *It* moves through strange curves and outrageous angles. Some day I shall travel in time and meet *it* face to face.

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THERE have been a number of letters from you, the readers, inquiring about John R. Speer, author of *Symphony of the Damned* and *The Carnal God*. John Rawson Speer is a new writer. He was formerly an actor, but when the Depression settled down over the country, the ancient and honorable profession of actor was hit a body blow. Mr. Speer then enlisted in the United States Navy, where he has just completed his first enlistment. Another new writer is Thomas P. Kelley, author of our current serial story, *The Last Pharaoh*. As Tommy Kelley—"Pride of Miami Beach"—he engaged in some eighty-seven prize fights during the seasons of 1927-1928-1929.

Death of H. P. Lovecraft

Kenneth Sterling, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, writes: "I am sure you must be deeply grieved at the passing of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. A contributor to WEIRD TALES since its inception, he has always been considered one of the leading writers of modern weird literature, and was, in my opinion, the pre-eminent creative artist in this field. His vivid, powerful style, unsurpassed in producing and sustaining a mood of horror, is well known to you and your readers. His decease leaves a gap which can never be filled. But it is a far more severe loss to those of us who had the infinite pleasure of a personal acquaintance with the inimitable 'Ech-Pi-El.' His generosity and magnanimity won the love the respect of all who knew him. He possessed a supreme intellect—one which I have never seen exceeded—and I have come in contact with many prominent professors at Harvard University. He had an incredible store of knowledge—he was versed in virtually every field of learning. In addition to this great erudition, he had an acutely analytical mind—his thinking was keenly logical and free of all bias and closed-minded narrowness. Contrary to what one would be led to expect from his fiction, Lovecraft was a confirmed materialist and iconoclast, as expressed in innumerable letters and articles. His conversation was transcendently brilliant, outshining even his excellent writings. He was a man of great vigor and sincerity, and had great influence on his circle of friends, many of whom are noted authors in the fantasy field and other types of fiction. I think it would be most fitting if H. P. Lovecraft were remembered as a scholar and thinker as well as an author. In closing, let me urge you to reprint many of Lovecraft's fine stories and poems, and if possible, to have his works published in permanent book form."

From Clark Ashton Smith

Clark Ashton Smith writes from Auburn, California: "I am profoundly saddened by the news of H. P. Lovecraft's death after a month of painful illness. The loss seems an intolerable one, and I am sure that it will be felt deeply and permanently by the whole weird fiction public. Most of all will it be felt by the myriad friends who knew Lovecraft through face-to-face meeting or correspondence: for in his case the highest literary genius was allied to the most brilliant and most endearing personal qualities. I—alas!—never met him, but we had corresponded for about seventeen years, and I felt that I knew him better than most people with whom I was thrown in daily intimacy. The first manuscript of his that I read (probably in 1920) confirmed me in the opinion of his genius from which I have never swerved at any time. It opened a new world of awesome speculation and eery sur-

mise, a new imaginative dimension. Since then, he has written scores of masterpieces that extend the borders of human fantasy and conquer fresh empires amid the extra-human and ultra-terrestrial infinities. Among these, I might mention *The Outsider, The Call of Cthulhu, The Color Out of Space, The Rats in the Walls, The Dunwich Horror, Pickman's Model* and *The Dreams in the Witch-House* as being special favorites. However, there are few tales of his that I have not read and re-read many times, always with that peculiar delight given by the savor of some uniquely potent distillation of dreams and fantasy. Leng and Lomar and witch-ridden Arkham and sea-cursed Innsmouth are part of my mental geography; and dreadful, cyclopean R'lyeh slumbers somewhere in the depths. Others will venture into the realms that the Silver Key of his mastery has unlocked; but none will read them with the same wizard surety, or bring back for our delectation essences of equal dread and beauty and horror."

From Edmond Hamilton

Edmond Hamilton writes from New Castle, Pennsylvania: "I just heard the news of H. P. Lovecraft's recent death. This is quite a shock, coming so soon after the death of Howard. While I never met either of them, I have been appearing with them in WEIRD TALES for so long that I had a dim feeling of acquaintance. I think I read every one of Lovecraft's stories from *Dagon*, years ago. It is too bad that he is gone—there will never be another like him."

From Henry Kuttner

Henry Kuttner writes from Beverly Hills, California: "I've been feeling extremely depressed about Lovecraft's death. Even now I can't realize it. He was my literary idol since the days of *The Horror at Red Hook*, and lately a personal friend as well. The loss to literature is a very great one, but the loss to HPL's friends is greater. He seemed, somehow, to have been an integral part of my literary life—and the shock was more severe because I had not known that his illness was serious."

From Earl Peirce, Jr.

Earl Peirce, Jr., writes from Washington, D. C.: "The news of Lovecraft's passing, although not the shock of surprize, is nevertheless the shock of an irreparable loss, not

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alone to WT, but to his admirers and acquaintances the world over. I shall always regret that I never had the good fortune of meeting him personally, but I am truly grateful for the impulse which prompted me to write to him a few months ago, and that I have two letters in his own hand. What most impressed me were his sincerity and genuineness, which qualities were not alone in making him unique among modern writers. You have my sympathy, for this must be a hard time, but I imagine it is a feeling of pride for you to know that so many of his stories originally appeared in WEIRD TALES. Unlike many other men of genius, Lovecraft was fortunate enough to be living at a time when his work was recognized as outstanding. With the passing of time this recognition will become more universal and his work will take its proper place in the world's great literature."

Concise Comments

John Hartsfield, of New Bern, North Carolina, writes: "How about some more stories from Seabury Quinn? His are the 'business.' Incidentally, where does Mr. Quinn live?" [You shall have more stories by Mr. Quinn; another of his fascinating tales about Jules de Grandin will appear in WT soon. Mr. Quinn lives in Brooklyn.]

Miss Mary A. Conklin, of Coldwater, Michigan, writes: "Fine issue this month (April). Virgil Finlay's cover superb. Fine handling of shadows and colors. More, please!"

I. I. Mabbott, of New York City, writes: "*The Mannikin,* by Robert Bloch, is the most original thing in a long while; the undeveloped twin theme is new to me. *Fessenden's Worlds* is good, but I've read a similar story from the point of view of the tiny people."

Samuel Gordon, of Washington, D. C., writes: "After meeting Earl Peirce personally, I may be prejudiced in his favor, but I think his story, *The Death Mask,* is the best in the April issue. Henry Kuttner's little story, *We Are the Dead,* certainly clicked. If you know Arlington Cemetery, you can appreciate Kuttner's story. By the way, I know why they died. It was to make the world safe for democracy. Of course."

Dorothy Reed, of Sacramento, California, writes: "No modern magazine gives me so much pleasure as WEIRD TALES. It may be a streak of ghoulish atavism in me, but I am sincerely glad there are many others who feel the same."

Marianne Ferguson, of Worcester, Massachusetts, writes: "The cover on January didn't follow the story true enough, but you sure made up with the February cover, the best cover in years. I liked it much better than naked, shrieking maids. It was truly weird. *Dig Me No Grave,* Robert E. Howard's classic, was a thriller; I heaved not a few shudders, and you can bet I avoided dark places for a week."

Dorothy McCown, of Daytona Beach, Florida, writes: "*The Death Mask* is one of the best stories of its kind I've ever read. Unusual style."

Robert A. Madle, of Philadelphia, writes: "Virgil Finlay's second cover is even better than his initial outside drawing. It would please me immensely if you continue to alternate with Margaret Brundage and Virgil Finlay on the covers. Whatever you do, don't lose either of them. They are the best cover artists I have ever seen, and their drawings make WT appear much more attractive than other magazines."

B. Burnill, of Seattle, writes: "I liked Henry Hasse's *Guardian of the Book* best of all in the March WT—think the lad should develop into a fine WEIRD TALES writer. It was *excellent.*"

Bruce Bryan, of Washington, D. C., writes: "Lovecraft had a rare faculty for beginning with something commonplace and building up an overwhelming aura of horror that left his readers hanging onto the ropes. In that sense, I can't think of anyone who could surpass him. He had a knack of delving into man's subconscious, untranslated fears—putting them into an appreciable form, giving them appealing names and personifying one's own, inmost, half-comprehended, even personal nightmares."

L. M. Nankivell, of Steelton, Pennsylvania, writes: "*Dwar the Accursed* recalls scenes depicted by Robert E. Howard. I hope the author will continue. The dialogue was good. Henry Kuttner's story was good also, as all of his tales always are."

John V. Baltadonis, of Philadelphia, writes: "The new serial, *The Last Pharaoh,* starts off fine. I look forward eagerly to the next issue to continue this thrilling yarn."

Richard F. Behm, of Los Angeles, writes:

"Seemingly the author of *Symphony of the Damned* delved into the ancient books of black magic, etc. He was able to turn out something equally as weird, yet with a decidedly modern trend."

Fingernail Gnawing

Arthur L. Widner, Jr., of Waterbury, Vermont, writes: "Although I'm not normally a nervous person I have the well known but bad habit of biting my fingernails. Ordinarily I am content to nibble a nail or two a day, alternating on each hand every week; but after reading the March issue of WT, I looked like a male counterpart of the Venus De Milo, excluding the handsome part of it. *The Guardian of the Book* made me consume my entire left arm. A powerful tale. Henry Hasse must fill his pen with that Good Gulf. *The Brood of Bubastis* did very well on my right forearm, and *The Dark Star* awoke my cannibalistic instincts enough to finish up to my shoulder. All the stories were good, with Lovecraft and Quick getting honorable mention."

The Greatest Genius

Harold S. Farnese, of Los Angeles, writes: "Reading your magazine habitually, I sometimes wonder whether you ever realized how great a contributor you had in H. P. Lovecraft. Whether you ever gaged the fineness of his stories, the originality of his genius? Of course, you published them, alongside of others. You sent him his cheque, and that was that. But has it ever occurred to you that in Lovecraft you had the greatest genius that ever lived in the realm of weird fiction?"

Surprize

L.H.K. writes from Pasadena, California: "Have read your magazine for a long time and enjoy it very much—but for the sake of an 'old reader' can't you *please* do something about always spelling *surprise* with a *z*?" [The Funk & Wagnalls Standard Dictionary gives *surprize* as the preferred spelling.—THE EDITOR.]

The Scarab

Julius Hopkins writes from Washington, D. C.: "*The Necronomists*, the Washington Weird Tales Club, is going to publish the first issue of its official organ, *The Scarab*, on May 15 and we are going to give abso-

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lutely free copies to the first one thousand readers of WEIRD TALES who write and ask for them. Our magazine will be a printed affair with twenty-four pages including a cover with a real weird illustration. All requests for these free copies must be mailed to 4522 15th St., N. W., Washington, D. C."

The Little Eaglets

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes: "Shux now—I just been a-wonderin' if you couldn't be the eagle and we readers all the funny li'l eaglets—this department being the Eyrie. This sudden brain wave just occurred to me. . . . *Duar the Accursed*—Do I detect a slight resemblance to Conan the Barbarian? Mr. Ball is agonna be a pal of mine if he keeps up that type of tale. Aw gorsh—I was figgerin' on the Monster being real and not a nit-wit butcher in *The Mark of the Monster*. It was exciting up to the unmasking of the Devil-spawned twin brother. . . . (Personal to Editor:—Why don't authors use ordinary names for a change—I'm tired of reading odd names and suddenly realizing I've been reading them wrong. In this issue I find Valyne, Leocadie, Lavinia—ugh! I don't mind odd names when used in odd tales of old forgotten ages—or of lives on spheres beyond our ken. Course, I'm not expecting anyone to do anything about it, but I like to get it off my chest.) I have not been disappointed in Hazel Heald's story of *The Horror in the Burying-Ground*. The lady knows how to keep one's interest brimming. Her method of relating the circumstances as told by the general store council has a touch of humor. Any hard-fisted citizen would condemn them for a bunch of crackpots. As for me—I'd listen, git werry uncomfy and when the tale is done, run like heck for home. . . . How strange—how utterly stupefying this *Vallisneria Madness!* It was beautiful—one of those times when words fail me again. I only can say, 'Thank you, Mr. Farley.' "

The Strange High House

H. W. Morlan, of Fort Knox, Tennessee, writes: "Those two comment-provokers, *The Last Archer* and *Guardian of the Book*, are indeed different. To me, they are a welcome reversion to the type of story seen in earlier years. The weird motif is stressed and carried out to a thought-provoking climax. Common adventure stories have no place in our magazine. I join Mr. Bloch in calling for more reprints by H. P. Lovecraft. Those stories are jeweled bits of artistry and I would particularly like to request *The Strange High House in the Mist*. My files fail to show the copy containing the original."

The Past Six Months

Charles H. Bert, of Philadelphia, writes: "I would like to speak of the stories that impressed me most favorably during the last six months, and a few things in general. I was indeed surprized to find in the May WEIRD TALES that *The Dark Star* by G. G. Pendarves didn't receive first place in the March number. It was a remarkable yarn. The translation of the hero into the picture, and his struggles with the evil entity and his subsequent escape, was really weird and shivery. This is the kind of story I always look for, something new and different! Equally as good but in another way, was *The Last Archer*, by Earl Peirce, Jr. Nothing new about a curse haunting the descendants of a family for generations and killing them off; your authors have used plots like this many times. But *The Last Archer* was a story in which the curse harmed no one but the one whom it was pronounced against; and it hounded Farquhar through the centuries in his search of 'the greatest archer,' until he finally killed himself on an island! The curse did not kill anyone except Farquhar, and that was a unique ending for a fine tale. . . . *Symphony of the Damned* by John Speer is a yarn I will long remember. It is worthy to stand in the company of *Satan's Fiddle*, published a decade ago. Speer's story was Faustian in character, a man sells his soul to the devil for power and fame. The best story in recent months was *The Globe of Memories* by Seabury Quinn. Lady Fulvia was so real and likable a character, that one cannot help sympathizing and loving her, and pitying the fate that overtook her. Quinn's story was one of the best reincarnation stories I have ever read in your fine magazine. I am certainly glad that *The Globe of Memories* did not end in tragedy as most of your stories do. When I first read the yarn, so powerfully was I affected by it, that within a few days I read it again! That story is not easily forgotten. . . . Another story I enjoyed was *The Poppy Pearl*

by Frank Owen. It was a refreshing relief compared with your heavy horror tales. I am unable to understand why some of your readers did not like it. Please give us more of this type. Howard's stories possess a virility your other authors couldn't duplicate, and I was especially pleased with *Dig Me No Grave* and *Black Hound of Death*. Those tales were strong in horror, and I am unable to decide which is the best. His best character creation was Solomon Kane, in my opinion."

Bouquets and Brickbats

Arthur E. Walker, of Colorado Springs, writes: "As a constant reader of your magazine for a good many years, I want to register a few compliments and kicks. I realize, of course, that you cannot have each story a top-notcher every month. However, WEIRD TALES is the best magazine I have found and it improves through the years. *The Last Archer* and *Shambleau* are two of the best tales I ever read. Howard's stuff read like a passage from the *Arabian Nights* and I, too, lament his passing. A bit of love interest adds to your stories. I like Doctor Satan and also Lovecraft's stories. Seabury Quinn rates much higher when he drops the silly de Grandin stuff. Like one of your contributors, I have had enough of the forbidden books, the discussion of which takes up about half of the story. I am also getting fed up with the 'old ones' who are continually wriggling into the third dimension through forbidden nooks and crannies. Some of your yarns are too complex; they sound more like half-baked lectures on higher mathematics than ghost stories. I lose interest in the story, trying to figure out the significance of triangles, trapezoids and pentagons. . . . Your best story this month is *Dnar the Accursed*."

Symphony of the Damned

Harry C. Williamson, of Los Angeles, writes: "I have just finished reading *Symphony of the Damned*, by John R. Speer, and just wanted to drop you a line telling you how very much I enjoyed it. The plot is very good and the author pictures his characters so vividly that the readers can almost live the story as they read along. There is just enough blood and thunder in it to make it good reading and in no way revolting. I only hope we shall soon have

NEXT MONTH

THE ABYSS UNDER THE WORLD

By J. PAUL SUTER

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the good fortune to read another such story by the same author, as he has made such a splendid start and it would be a shame not to have some more from his soon famous pen."

Conan His Favorite Character

A. H. McDonald, of Little Rock, Arkansas, writes: "I have been a constant reader of WT for eleven years and it has afforded me many hours of enjoyment. It was with deepest regret that I read of the death of Robert E. Howard. It is a sad thought to know that I can never again follow Conan through his strange lands. Conan was my favorite character."

Praise Across the Sea

Leslie Stille, of Harrow-on-the-Hill, England, writes: "I don't know how often it is that you receive praise across the Atlantic, but I feel that WT deserves a great deal. I saw a copy of the magazine one day for the first time on sale at a news agent's and the cover attracted me immediately (can you wonder?). Since then I have called at every news agent I could for further copies. I introduced them to my friends, too. How your spine-chilling stories compare with the feeble, lukewarm, insipid apologies that are so often published! The stories in WT are something altogether new in the fiction I have read—something for which I have longed — utterly gripping and fantastic, breath-taking in their weirdness. But please don't adulterate and dilute it with pseudo-scientific stories and thinly-disguised detective yarns. There are other magazines for those who like such stuff. Let WT be something *unique* and striking. Avoid the commonplace and banal."

Paging Moore and Smith

T. Gelbut, of Niagara Falls, New York, writes: "Just a few lines to let you know that WT keeps satisfying my prodigious appetite for the weird, grotesque and sorcerous in literature. I do miss C. L. Moore's Northwest Smith stories (incidentally the only writer of interplanetary fiction that I enjoy reading). C. A. Smith is also infrequently found in WT, and I sadly look in vain for his tales of sorcery and necromancy for which he is so justly famous."

Your Favorite Story

Readers, what stories do you like best in this issue? Write us a letter, or fill out the coupon on this page, and mail it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. Your favorite story in the May WEIRD TALES, as shown by your votes and letters, was *Duar the Accursed*, by Clifford Ball. This was pressed for first honors by *The Salem Horror*, by Henry Kuttner.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JULY WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1) ----------	----------
(2) ----------	----------
(3) ----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1) ---------- Why? ----------

(2) ---------- ----------

Reader's name and address:

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W. T.—8

COMING NEXT MONTH

SANDERSON'S big brown hands fumbled as he tugged and strained at the flooring. He felt suddenly hot and weak. There was a flurry in his brain. Still on his knees, he gathered up his tools.

He rattled and banged things about, trying to shut out other sounds . . . sounds on the stairs. . . .

The breath seemed to stop in his big body.

Creak. Creak. Creak.

It *was* someone cautiously stealing downstairs.

Crack!

He knew that sound. It was the broken step, third from the bottom. He tried to call out. It must be that damned oaf, Walter! The fool must have gone to sleep up there.

His hunted eyes sought the window. Power to move, to jump for it, had left him. He knelt there, powerful shoulders hunched, hands on the floor for support, crouched like a big frightened animal. He fought to prevent himself looking over his shoulder at the door behind him. He *knew* it was opening. He heard stealthy fingers on the old loose knob. He heard the harsh scrape of wood on wood as the sagging door was pushed back.

Ice-cold wind blew in, rustled bits of paper and shavings on the floor.

Sanderson's head jerked back to look. The door stood widely open. His eyes, filmed with terror, focussed achingly on the gap between door and wall. Darkness moved there. A Thing of Darkness. On the threshold it bulked in shapeless moving menace. Darkness made visible . . . blotting out everything . . . blotting out life itself. . . .

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By G. G. Pendarves

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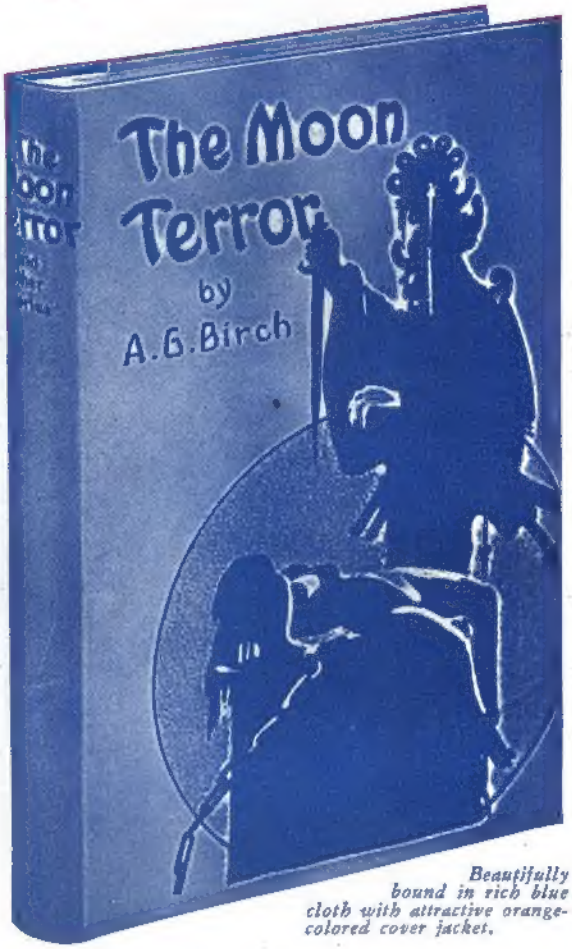

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